

MANHUNT

A dramatic black and white photograph of a woman in a light-colored dress falling down a dark, ornate staircase. She is in mid-air, with her arms outstretched and a look of shock or fear on her face. The staircase has a decorative metal railing. The background is a plain wall.

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

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EVERY STORY NEW!

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Avengeing Angel

New, brand new! She stared into the mirror. The reflection stared back, and it was not Eva Sadreski . . . it was Dawn Carlton.

BY MARK DEL FRANCO

EVA STROKED a loving hand over her new face as she stood entranced before the bathroom mirror; she was remembering for the last time what had been before the miracle. She swayed her reflection in and out of the mirror exorcizing the old Eva.

'Fatty fatty, who's your father?'

'Fatty fatty, who's your father?'

Distant voices in her ears chanted the leitmotif of her sordid childhood in Meriton.

With her nose pressed against it, the mirror fogged from her humid breath. Inside, her mother's face filtered out and leered back, obscured behind the mist. Eva dully recalled the great gray zeppelin of a woman inflated with the vapours of drink and bad digestion. And Eva remembered the uncles, the innumerable uncles; she had never known a father. Just for a moment the rank odors of despair and obesity came



alive in her nostrils and a word meaning illegitimate flashed neon in her brain. She was disappointed that so much of the old Eva still remained. But that was only inside.

Drawing close to the mirror again she mugged at herself, a Narcissus caught up in the seine of self-love, ignoring the echoes of the past, erasing all that with this new passion.

"No more of that life now," she said, "because of my miracle." She made a lyric of the word for a childish tune, "miracle, miracle, mirrrrrrracle," she sang.

The incessant hope of her dreams and prayers had finally materialized. But Eva was no longer a child; she was a woman of twenty two; she didn't really pray any more. Now, in New York, she wore about her a film of sadly spun sophistication and she tended to regard the entire transformation as a miracle of modern technology.

She purred and the dreaminess left her. She became a euphoric creature, gesticulating wildly, completely alone, emoting, mouth gaping, head tossed back; her hands flailed over the ecstasy of her new curvature. She made little squeaking noises. Then just as suddenly she stopped and continued her toilet, pensively.

Eva was thinking about Diana, the goddess Diana, emerging radiantly from the sea, the symbol of love and beauty, golden slender Diana before a rich blue velvet backdrop in Thumbalina's window.

Miraculous Thumbalina's! Their hands had ripped the old Eva from her. Diet and exercise, pummelling and kneading her obese form they transformed her remarkably quickly into a well groomed, poised and very shapely woman. Outwardly Eva was a completely different person. Her life had become an exciting masquerade. In a strange way, dream suddenly was reality.

Surgery had given her a new nose to finish the job and Eva was indeed a new Diana coming up out of the depths. Now with the old Eva systematically slain, the new Eva schemed a new life to suit the nymph she had become.

"Meriton, look out! Here comes Dawn Carlton," she warned. "Ravish, ravish them," she growled gently, pressing the "r" emphatically, recalling her diction lessons. What weapons she now had. She went out of the bathroom into the bedroom to dress.

She stood naked in front of a full length mirror ogling her body and sighing at the marvel of her elastic skin. It took its shape almost perfectly so that one could never have guessed its former distortion. She grinned and licked an arc over the sculpted symmetry of her capped teeth.

"Oh Dawn honey I love you," she exploded, then fell gurgling onto the bed her arms tightly embracing herself. When she had calmed she lit a cigarette and finished dressing. This finished she picked up the

phone. "Would you send Bert up to thirty three please? Yes I'm leaving today. Unhuh. Thank you very much Charlie, you're a doll," Eva sang into the phone brandishing her weapon of voice. She dropped the receiver into the cradle, smiling. In a noticeably short time came the knock at the door. "It's open Bert," she trilled.

A uniformed man in his late thirties walked with practised indifference into the room scrutinizing a ring of keys in his hand, which he suddenly pocketed with a swift jingle. He jerked carelessly to attention. "Room service," he announced tunefully, as though he had made a private joke.

"I'm leaving Bert; I called you to take care of my bags," Eva said mechanically, oblivious of the bell-boy.

"They're in good hands," he said, widening his grin at his esoteric comedy.

Eva stared at the bell-boy for a long moment with her mouth half open, as though words were trapped in her throat. Then cautiously feline, she purred, "Berrrt, you like me I know; is that because I do something to you? I mean, do you think I do something to men? Oh you know what I mean Bert. Do I?" She ended in a sort of exasperation for she really knew the answer to her question. Men always glanced at her furtively a second time.

Bert looked astonished. The query struck him as being magnificently

naive. Ever since she had breezed into the hotel from the YWCA he had been working on her with his friendly leering, his joking suggestiveness. He searched her question for a double meaning. But his anxiety forced him to state an opinion. "You're a damn pretty girl Evie; any guy'd flip for you. You've really got that something, like you should be a model or something, you know what I mean?"

"Bert you're a doll," Eva blushed slightly, and Bert wheezed a phlegmy laugh through tobacco-tanned teeth making a figure eight with his hands to finalize his appraisal.

They stood there suspended in a moment of nervous silence, overwhelmed by the intimacy of having revealed too much of their inner selves. It was as though, for an instant, each had seen a piece of the other's soul. Then Bert laughed. Eva looked away and smiled knowingly to herself, and it passed.

Eva was pent up inside, thinking of Dawn Carlton and the trip to Meriton, and the future. She began telling Bert about herself, about her childhood, her transformation and her purpose in returning to Meriton. Bert listened to it all in rapt silence.

Meriton lay dozing in a lush valley; there was a drone of lazy flies about it. A slow July buzz pestered about the station as Eva glided buoyantly from the train. The aura of city clung about her as she flounced

confidently through the station where she elicited a small riot of furtive admiration. There were subtle explosions of elbows into ribs as the vibrant wave oscillated by; the wake of her exciting odor trailed behind Eva and charged the air with the suggestion of beauty.

"An indefinite stay," Eva replied dramatically, as she signed her new name to the register at the Village Inn. She said the name to herself as she wrote, 'Miss Dawn Carlton'. The desk clerk ran the hands in his eyes over her form while her eyes were busy signing; she smiled to herself knowing what he was doing. She swelled now with the confidence that no one would recognize her, and she began to feel superior to the whole town. "If they only knew," she giggled to herself, and she felt like screeching at the top of her voice, "Look it's me, fat 'n ugly, Eva Sadreski, fat and ugly, remember?" She laughed to hear it inside her head. Then Dawn Carlton bought cigarettes and a sex magazine, threw the full force of her physical teasing about the lobby and retired to her room.

Before the day's buzz died it was all over town about the woman from New York. From her open window Eva could vaguely hear it, a sporadic lisp of groups passing the hotel, taking sidelong looks up to her window. Meriton was tender kindling and Eva had hit town like a flash fire. It was psychological arson.

In the tap-room of the Village Inn

the beer drinkers chewed their gaseous cud, ruminating through the bits of news that had sprung up during the day. The usual lowing monotone of the room was heightening in pitch. But this bovine neurasthenia was mostly feigned. At the root of his being each man began to stampede.

Finally some of the men began to talk about it openly. The town heroes, the playboys, settled the issue at their table. "I tell you she is one," offered one of the local libertines, "but a high class one, mind you, a twenty five dollar one at least." He brought his beer glass down authoritatively onto the table to add weight to his affirmation. And that was all there was to it. They simply said what everyone else had been thinking and now it was irrefutable.

So she was one, and no one doubted the fact. They had to believe, to feel the excitement of having that kind of woman in town. There was no doubt about it, because you could tell by the way she dressed and painted her eyes with that green stuff, and if you still weren't sure, you just had to look at the way she walked.

Saturday in Meriton was giddy. There was a steady procession from every corner of town down to the ritual gathering at the Village Inn. The magnetism was great this Saturday. The men were waiting for Eva to come out into the street.

The small crowd was taut and the tension hung about it like an ethe-

real tuning of a hoedown fiddle. A savage music was in the men, waiting to be played. Then Eva, gyrating in a tight dress, danced out from the Inn. Every head ripped around. The connection of eyes was strained and obvious. Eva almost spoke. But she didn't say a word, preferring to throw her salutation to them with her eyes; then she turned from them and made her speech with her hips as she walked uptown.

The playboys especially, tortured themselves with their frenzied imaginations. An unholy tongue of flame talked obscenely to each burning heart. And it was a very special burning, the burning that is in each man for the impossible woman, the woman he can never know, the woman that exists only in a man's brain, the woman he lives with all his life. Ah, the hell of Eva's miracle, for in Meriton she had become the incarnation of this myth.

It was a 'Walter Mitty' thing with the men, for each pictured himself approaching Eva, exuding urbanity, winning her wares gratis, with a flourish, like the night people they only read about. But in fact, no one moved towards her; with most men the thought is enough. So they drank beer trying to drown the burning, but that only fuelled the fire so that their brains stewed over the blaze. In a few, the volatile thought gained pressure.

It was about eight o'clock that evening when Roger Paillard phoned from the lobby. He stum-

bled through a piece of thick-tongued bravado, "so since you're ah . . . ahhh . . . stranger in town, you know what I mean . . . well I wouldn't want you to be . . . ah lonely tonight; huh? Yeah, hehheh," he laughed nervously, feeling stupid as the words jerked mechanically out of his mouth "Yeah I'm single," he lied; "no no, there won't be any posse after you in the morning, heh heh, no, really." He felt the perfect hick. "Hick hick," he yelled inside himself. He was steaming the phonebooth, sweating; he unloaded his eyebrows with his forefinger. "A quarter past twelve? Can't you make it any earlier? Nobody will see me . . . no no no, whenever you say. Okay, quarter past twelve, yeah, sharp."

The toothy rift in his face and the glistening sweat on it gave him the aspect of a glazed gargoyle. He bought a cigar at the lobby tuckshop, jammed it into his face, and swaggered back to the tap-room past Greg Hurst, who was headed in the general direction of the hot lobby phone. They exchanged a garbled greeting, "Aaaaaa Greg," Roger growled, the cigar muting the trombone of his voice.

"Hey hey," came Greg's mechanical gait.

For the next few hours inside the tap-room, Roger Paillard's blatant voice could be heard blaring out double-forced at the latest redundancies in local humor. "Quarter past twelve," he kept saying over

and over to himself as he hid behind the roar of his voice, nervously waiting.

At eleven forty five the back stairs of the Inn creaked loudly and Greg Hurst winced as he mounted gingerly to room number three. His heart beat his head with a staccato pounding. He ran his fingers over the numeral on the door, then knocked. He drew a deep breath and screamed inside himself, "This is it".

The door opened slowly and Eva stood before Greg dramatically framed by a subtle light from a far corner of the room. She flowed dimly in silks, in silks that hissed teasingly as she stepped forward catching up his hands in hers. She backed into the room pulling him at arm's length. Eva moved gracefully, in an almost imperceptible dance, while Greg trembled. The dark of the room had become the darkness of Greg's own mind and the woman he saw there lived only in his mind. He could only think of what she must be for him: the myth of those eloquent hips he'd seen in the street.

She led him through the semi-darkness that guilded her so wildly toward the bedroom. Greg could see only the woman he thought he'd never have. She was before him now and he would have her. He was almost weak from the beating of his heart, when slowly and deliberately she slid her arms about his neck and began kissing him.

A white flash popped in Greg's head. He saw himself and the woman glare ghostly and die in an instant. For a moment he was blind. Then the lights flooded over him and there was a third person in the room; it was Bert. He turned a key in the desk lock then handed it to Eva who dropped it into her bosom. Eva then announced in a hard, emphatic voice, "My friend has just taken a photograph of you and me together. If you wish you may buy the negative. If you do not buy it, copies of the picture will be circulated about town. You may, of course, do as you wish. You may even call the police."

Hurst sank onto the bed, dumbfounded. He could accomplish nothing by violence, except to make matters worse, and he knew it. He ran his hand through the balding debris on his forehead, then looked up savagely at Eva.

"Who are you?" he hissed.

"Don't you know me, Mister Hurst?"

"How do you know my name? Who are you anyway?" Hurst shot back, wild with fear.

"I'm not sure I can answer your question," Eva replied, getting very serious.

"What in hell do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said, I'm not sure who I am."

"You're crazy, that's what. You're nuts."

"When I lived here in Meriton

my name was Eva Sadreski, but that was only my mother's name. My real name might be Hurst, for all I know. Do you follow me, *Mister Hurst?*"

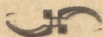
"Eva Sadreski," Hurst whispered to himself in disbelief. "No . . . that's impossible, no," he mumbled as though demented by the revelation. He had known Eva's mother, had known her too well, but so had so many others. And again the dread suspicion returned. The guilt repressed for twenty two years poured into Hurst's face and Eva saw the same expression for the eighth time that evening. Like the others, Hurst paid—a thousand dollars!

Down in the lobby Greg was still dazed. He needed a drink badly, a stiff drink. He headed for the boot-

legger's, and damned the cost. Full of fear and shame, he couldn't stand himself.

Crossing the parking lot at the rear of the Inn, he caught a glimpse of Roger Paillard going around to the back stairs. Hurst remained silent for a minute or two, then he exploded with hysterical laughter, howling and banging his fists on the hood of his car.

Some of the denizens of the tap-room heard the commotion and came rushing out, hoping to see a fight. But only Greg was there, repeating idiotically, "What a joke, what a hell of a joke". And the boys began to laugh with him, because he was a playboy, agreeing that it must have been one hell of a good joke.



PRISON BREAK



*It was a well-ordered plan, and there hadn't been a hitch.
But somehow, Basil knew down deep that it wouldn't work.*

IT WAS daylight when Basil picked up Ma Clauser and Glen and drove to Van Ness Avenue. He pulled to the corner and cut the engine. They checked and rechecked their watches and they watched the sky over the ocean where the sun was setting, and waited.

There wasn't anything to say. It had all been worked out and memorized.

Basil put his hand under his jacket and adjusted the gun; the steel was pinching his skin under the belt. He combed his fingers through his black hair and felt the sweat on his forehead. He thought back to the days on Porkchop Hill in Korea. Christ! I must be getting old, he thought grimly.

The hands of Glen's watch touched five o'clock.

"Basil? It's five."

The car pulled away from the curb and turned around a short distance from where the street joins the pier. It stopped facing Lombard Street that leads across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Glen climbed out and gave his Ma a hand. He put his face in at the window.

"Well? Come on."

The three of them pulled fishing-poles, a bait pail, and the rope-ladder

out of the backseat and carried them out on the pier. In the bait pail was the .38 caliber ammunition. A fisherman passed them on their way out.

"Gonna waste your time tonight, I'm afraid," he said. "Nothing's biting."

But from there out the pier was deserted. Basil's eyes fastened on the beacon on top of Alcatraz light-house, pulsing across the water like a heartbeat. And he realized suddenly and clearly he was going through with it. For whatever reason, he couldn't back out. He hadn't ever backed out of anything with a challenge.

The decision had been made two weeks ago—that Thursday night...

He had come in promptly at nine o'clock, shed his hooded fishing jacket and taken his place at the kitchen table across from Glen. Old Ma Clauser was in her usual place under the bright ceiling light, her head cocked so her one good eye focused on her fingers braiding the seven strands of fishline. Her other eye was crusted over with fog. He heard that it had been injured long ago by a cat's claw.

Elmira, her daughter, a thin, brooding reed of a girl, was huddled on a chair by the radiator reading a comic book. She was seventeen. But

by looking at her or talking to her you wouldn't know it.

It started with the routine of other Thursday nights. But tonight there would be an uproar when he told them he wanted out—eight months was enough; he had earned his four grand, etc. The real reason would make him sound crazy, full of superstition. Maybe he was.

Glen punctured a can of beer and shoved it across to him.

"How'd it go, Basil?"

He took a slug from the can first, wondering if this was the time to unload it. "About the boat you mean?" He knew that's what he meant. "No. I didn't get one."

"Why?"

"What's the good of a boat before we're ready? And I don't think we'll ever be ready." He sat the can on the table and looked at it. "Besides," he began, "I've decided—"

"We're ready." Glen's face had broken into a broad grin. He looked at Ma, but she wasn't paying attention.

He said, "Ma, I got something to tell."

"What?" she asked without looking up.

"I talked to a guy named Fred Strickland who sometimes runs food out to The Rock when they go short."

"What's that?" she demanded.

"He's a supervisor of a wholesale food outlet warehouse near pier twenty-seven."

"My God!" Then, "Can he be

bought?" It sounded like a prayer.

"He's in debt to here, Ma." Glen raised a hand to his neck.

Basil looked at the kid in wonder. Glen must have been privately working on the snag in the plan for the past three months . . . trying to wrap it up as a kind of gift for his old lady. He felt like a cigarette and started to get them out of his jacket when Elmira began hollering.

"Why don't you all just leave him there! Huh? That's where he belongs!"

"Shut up!" Ma snapped. "Shut up your mouth! You hear?"

"I won't shut up! That's where he belongs!—that's where he belongs! On a rock out on the water!"

Ma raised out of her chair. "He's your brother! You don't talk about your brother that way!—you little bitch!"

"Mel" Elmira's head went back and her laugh was sarcastic and bitter. "Me? After what he done you call me a bitch? After what he done to me—"

Basil was staring at Elmira and he didn't see Ma move away from the table until she was in front of her slapping her with both hands.

And suddenly it was all over and she was quiet again. The embarrassed silence broken only by the sobs muffled in her hands.

After that Thursday night things began to roll. Strickland agreed to cooperate when the bid hit six thousand dollars. But he had to be satisfied with a ration of three now, the

rest later. "That way we can trust him," was what Ma said. But four grand was all there was left of the money Clete had left her before he was convicted of armed robbery and murder three years ago.

The first day they secured one end of the line to the outermost stanchion of the pier and fed it off the boat to within three hundred yards of Alcatraz. This meant about 1,000 yards of line laying at the bottom of San Francisco Bay. But they were not congratulating themselves that evening. The next day's risks nagged privately at each of them. They sipped solemnly at their coffees and spoke after unusual silences. Glen asked in an oddly quiet voice, "Do you still think you can manage it, Basil?"

He answered with a lopsided grin, "Sure, why not?" He'd as well keep his thoughts to himself.

The three of them set off from a dock at Fisherman's Wharf a little before sunset. Basil steered a course directly toward Alcatraz Island, looking around every couple of minutes to be sure to keep the end of the pier directly aft the boat's stern. They traveled for five minutes at six knots along this imaginary path, then Basil cut the engines. He quickly strapped himself into the aqua-lung and pulled his feet into the flippers, asking as he worked if Glen was sure he understood. "Just head her right on in like I showed you. Remember—slowly." Then he slid into the water.

Glen waited four minutes, then took hold of the throttle and inched it forward. The motor groaned hoarsely, the boat crept toward the Island.

Over the wheel through the dirty steering window, the high prison lighthouse was framed against the grey sky—dead ahead. The sun, an amber ball off the port side, was sinking into the ocean beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. Already they were inside the 250-yard restricted area, marked off by buoys on three sides of the island. According to plan, he had to take it in much further. His shirt at the armpits became a shade darker with sweat as he watched the rock island grow larger and larger . . .

Basil swam about searching with his hands as well as his eyes for the place where they had thrown the line the day before. One of the last rays from the sun slanted down through the water and glinted off one of the gallon cans of cement that had been fixed to the line. He spotted it only yards from him and felt a great surge of relief. A little longer, a little darker and it would have been hopeless. He fumbled furiously through the mass of line for the end, then swam, dragging its weight toward the Island.

**THAT FISHING BOAT OFF
THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE
ISLAND — YOU'RE IN TOO
CLOSE! TURN AROUND! . . .
HEY! GET THAT BOAT
AWAY!**

The order was shouted through a speaker from one of the prison's gun towers.

Basil had explained about this. Still it slapped Glen and Ma with panic.

Glen's first impulse was to hit the switch to the deck and running lights. But he remembered Basil's warning and he let them on.

"Take the wheel and hold it like it is," he told Ma. He ran out on deck and grabbed the large fishing net and threw it over the side.

They were still moving in closer when the second warning was given.

Then Glen saw the lights of a boat appear round the far corner of the island. It was coming swiftly toward them. A bright searchlight cut a path ahead of it.

Ma saw it too and she shouted to Glen to come and turn the boat around.

He ran back into the cabin and took the wheel from her.

"No, Ma! We can't do that! We can't leave him."

"We can!" she rasped. "He don't matter! Clete's all that matters!"

Glen stared dumbly at the approaching light. But he held the boat firmly on its course.

There was a shout from the opposite side. It was Basil from the rope-ladder slung over the side.

"Glen! Turn it around. Get out of here!"

Basil scurried into his pants, man-aged two buttons on his shirt and

grabbed the net just as the light from the prison boat flashed on him.

Three uniformed men were standing on deck. Two of them held sub-machine guns.

He smiled stupidly into the glaring light as an angry voice shouted: WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? It came rasping loud through a megaphone.

"We're sorry," he answered simply. "We were trying to chase down a school of herring." He was making an effort to appear casual as he pulled in the net and spilled it on deck. "Guess we weren't paying attention and got in too close, huh?"

The voice shouted back: YOU DAMN FOOLS — YOU WANT TO GET SHOT OUT OF THE WATER? Then, WHAT COMPANY DO YOU WORK FOR?

"The Dilton Cannery Company. And they don't want to get shot out of the water," he said and thought to add "Sir."

He heard somebody laugh.

"It won't happen again," he yelled.

It was two days after Christmas when they got the call from Strickland.

Basil, his chin braced in his hands over the red oilcloth covered table, studied the smoke rising from his cigarette in the ashtray. Ma was looking fidgety again without the braiding to busy herself. Glen was saying:

"Ma, when you visited Clete, did you tell him how safe the lungs are?"

I mean," he began again, "you remember how he was. Ever since we was kids; that day at Lake Anza, I mean."

"You just worry about this end of it." She glanced at him coldly. "Don't worry none about my boy Clete."

Basil wasn't listening. He felt uneasy again about something and he didn't know what. Elmira stirred and got up. Their eyes met for a moment. He had caught her looking at him earlier that night. He watched her as she got a drink at the sink. She had a figure almost like a young boy's, he thought. Yet it was feminine. Her breasts made only small impressions against her cotton dress. But they were pointed and he imagined them firm like the underbelly of a blowfish. Her hips were narrow and her buttocks were not a hell of a lot bigger than the breasts on some women he had known. She moved as if ashamed of the small curves she did have.

The phone rang the second time before anyone rose to answer it.

It was Strickland, and the time for the delivery was perfect. They could see it on Glen's face when he laid the receiver down and faced them.

Ma sat silent for a time. Then she got up and put her coat on and a black shawl over her head.

They watched her. Glen said, "Ma where you going?"

"Out by the pier for awhile."

Like a thin, solemn statue of a

Medieval saint misplaced on a deserted boardwalk, Ma stood motionless in the chill night fog. She faced the rotating beacon above the big block of a building squatting heavily out there on the rocks. Her gaze switched to the end of the pier that hooked out into the bay like a bent finger and narrowed the distance to the island to barely a mile. . . . But the cold water moves swiftly between the island and the park, crawling its way in from the sea under the bridge, and like a trapped thing rushing wildly through the bay. She prayed. She hadn't prayed in twenty years. But she prayed hard now for her favorite child and cursed the world for not understanding him.

There was the faint sound of church bells carrying on the night air as Basil paused on the front steps to look at his watch. It was midnight. He was about to go on when he heard the door close behind him. He looked around and saw Elmira coming down the steps.

Her oval face caught the moonlight as she looked up at him. "Are you gonna help Ma try to get Clete free tomorrow?"

That's a stupid question. She knew he was.

"Yeah. I guess so."

She looked down to fidget with a button on the front of her dress.

"You shouldn't," she said finally.

Strange brooding kid, he thought.

"Hey, you better get back inside without a coat on. It's cold out here."

She brought her eyes up. "If you knew what he done you wouldn't help him."

He felt suddenly embarrassed. "That's none of my business," he said.

"He's a dirty — filthy pig! He should stay in jail for *ever!*"

He saw her eyes become suddenly hard and full of hate. He felt sorry for her and he knew he should say something but he didn't know what. He repeated that it was none of his business. But she couldn't hear him now.

"I was only twelve! He's nine years older than me! And he raped me! Twice! And you know what Ma said when I told her? Do you know what she said? She said I shouldn't of let him see me naked! I should know better! I was *twelve years old!*"

Basil felt disgust like a knot of dung well up inside him. He was miserable and helpless. He couldn't even put his arm around her. What good would that do?

"Listen," he said, trying to make his voice gentle but the words came out huskily; "you better go in before you catch cold. All that's over. You have to forget it."

He took her arm and led her up the steps to the door. He opened it and felt her body stiffen against his hand.

"Don't go down there tomorrow." There were streaks under her eyes, but her look was arid now.

"That wouldn't be any help, El-

mira. They could do it now by themselves." He saw her expression change and he thought she was going to get emotional again. "I've taken your ma's money. I have to." He turned quickly and walked away.

Just before they got to the end of the pier, it suddenly occurred to Basil what was disturbing him. But now that he knew, it didn't stop bothering him.

He tied the rope-ladder to the base of the concrete bench and threw the other end over the side of the pier. Ma watched silently as Glen climbed down it to the water to untie the line.

Basil glanced around edgily, hoping to see fog drifting in from the ocean. He saw instead the lights strung over the Golden Gate Bridge. He turned back and put a cigarette to his mouth. He was just about to light it when he realized what he was doing. His hand was shaking and he was having difficulty getting the cigarette back into the pack. He flung it into the water.

I can't picture next season . . . I can't picture next month. I can't see myself doing anything tomorrow. . . .

The unloading from the boat and reloading onto the prison truck was completed at 4:30. Strickland crawled in beside the uniformed driver and they pulled up to the gate where he got out for the routine search and inspection of the load. He climbed back in and made room

for an armed guard who crawled in next to the door. The truck lumbered on toward the prison mess hall.

He was shaking so he was afraid it would be noticed. And he was sweating, he realized. Sandwiched tightly in between them, his mind teetered on the decision whether to risk the attention of mopping his face.

He was counting fully now the negative possibilities of what he was doing and not the six thousand dollars. He thought of his wife. And what she would think of him. His children . . . his hear beat wildly.

But when the truck was nearly unloaded he paused to make sure he got the last wired-basket containing loaves of bread. He carried it in behind the driver.

The driver set his burden down on the floor beside a convict who was hefting the crates up onto shelves. The convict was short and spidery. He had a red scar across his cheek to a corner of his mouth. The convict was Clete Clauser.

The driver returned to the truck to remove the planking and hitch-up the tailgate. Strickland moved behind the stacks and hollered, "Hey give me a hand with this. It's slipping."

This gave Clete the excuse to move down the aisle to him where they were hidden behind the loaded shelves.

Strickland caught his eye and laid a hand on a loaf of bread. Clete

grabbed it and clawed his hand in. He felt it, wiggled his fingers around and got a firm grip on it.

"Silencer?" The word was barely audible.

Strickland nodded, then walked around the shelves with Clete following close behind him.

They were almost to the door when the guard spotted Clete and barked, "Where do you think *you're* going?"

The glove of bread on Clete's hand jerked with a muffled noise. The guard dropped.

"W-why did you do that?" Strickland stammered.

"Shut up and get your clothes off!"

The next minute Strickland was trembling in his skivvies and T-shirt, gawking at Clete and sputtering, "You've got to make sure it looks like I'm not in on this!"

Clete slid up the zipper of the coat, and yanked the gun out of the bread, then shot him. He caught his body as it collapsed and dragged it behind the nearest shelves.

He pulled down the visor of the cap and walked out to the truck. He was pretending to wipe his face with a handkerchief as he crawled in the cab beside the driver.

"Let's go."

The driver glanced around, wondering where the escort was.

Clete dug the barrel into his side and repeated the order.

The driver clutched the vehicle and pulled it into low.

The guard at the gate came around and opened the cab door, and Clete blasted him in the face.

"Get his keys and open it," he ordered. "Come on! Get a move on."

The next minute the truck was rolling down the steep grade that led to the dock as Clete went over in his mind what Ma had told him. He squinted through the windshield at where the headlight beams faded into the fog. "The end of the line and the lungs will be anchored down about waist high in the water on a spot between the prison beacon and the glowing red lights at the end of the Hyde Street Pier across the bay."

"Stop here!" he ordered the driver. "Now get out."

The driver turned his head to look at him before pushing the door handle, a desperate question flashing in his eyes.

Clete slid across the seat and climbed down behind him. He held the gun to his back and pumped two bullets into him before the driver had a chance to turn.

The atmosphere suddenly became heavy to him with the smells of the bay as he ran towards a rocky section of beach. The swallowing, suffocating depth and vastness of it . . . the dead decaying fish and ugly breathing things carried in it. The very smell of it sent a sickening chill through him.

He scrambled down the jagged rocks to a small beach cove. From there he could make out the mark-

ers. But, half hidden in him, a fear of finding the line exerted itself against his will. He glanced around at No. 2 gun tower, a high, ominous structure fifty yards away.

The shrill blast of the prison alarm jarred him. He forced himself to wade out into the dark, churning water and felt the tide tugging at his legs. Only his panic made him keep splashing to find the line's loop and get it over his head. He strapped himself into the aqua-lung, turned the valve to the oxygen cell, tugged hard on the line and dived under. But when the water swirled around his face, he immediately wanted to fight toward the surface, to escape the horror that was burying him.

Glen was braced against the pier's railing, Basil close beside him when Glen cried, "I felt it—the line jerked!"

"Are you sure?" Ma cautioned.

"Yeah— yeah—" he breathed, hauling in with all his strength.

The screaming siren from the prison had alerted a Coast Guard patrol boat and it was speeding toward The Rock from the west.

Then Basil spotted the prison boat swinging around the Island from the opposite direction, its searchlight sweeping the water before it.

After a few minutes Basil relieved him. Arm over arm he heaved until his shoulders and arms ached. Finally he gave the line back to Glen.

He massaged a shoulder with a palm and looked about, noticing the fog for the first time. *It hadn't be-*

trayed them! He turned and saw the prison boat in close to the Island, its searchlight tracing the shoreline. The Coast Guard boat was out a ways searching the water. But it was to the southeast, crossing a path a swimmer would have to take in the currents. It was all going just as they had planned.

He took the line from Glen again as Ma examined the pile of it on the pier.

"We've got him over half way," she crowed. She was jumping about excitedly, her hands twisting and worrying the ends of her shawl.

A buoy was ringing somewhere. It struck faintly on the ear like a distant death knell.

Ma made a gasping sound that swung them around to look at her, then in the direction she was looking.

A car with a flashing red light sped down Van Ness and came to a stop at the foot of the street. The headlights remained on like two huge eyes blocking the base of the pier. The searchlight played over the water and shoreline in the Park. Glen cried "Down!" just as it changed directions and swept past them.

Crouched against the railing on his knees, Basil felt a swell of nausea that almost made him vomit. *Don't go down there tomorrow.* Elmira's voice rang in his ears. The words took on new meaning.

"Basil—do you think they saw us?" he heard Glen cry.

"It doesn't matter," he groaned. "It's no good now."

"What are you saying?" Ma's voice was fierce. "My boy's at the end of that line! Now you pull him in!"

"You pull him in," he said.

"Glen?" she called. "Glen, listen to me! We've got to get rid of that light!"

"That's suicide!" Basil fired at her, the word as condemning as he could make it sound.

"Against the railing. You can do it, Glen. Do you hear?"

"Yeah, Ma. I hear you."

Basil jockeyed around and saw Glen stuffing a handful of bullets into a pocket.

"Don't be crazy, kid! The only thing to do is blast our way off of here before more cars come and we don't have a chance. It's our only—" Glen was moving away.

"Glen!" Basil reached out and stopped him. "I'll go with you."

"No. Stay here and help Ma." His voice sounded strange. "Pull Cleve in. Hear?"

Basil dropped his hand and Glen was gone.

The searchlight was running the shoreline again. Basil stood up.

But there was the sound of shots and he stopped. Four, five bursts of fire, silence, then half a dozen more.

At the end of the long pier glowed one headlight. Nothing else.

He heard himself shouting, "Glen! Glen, are you all right?" and Ma was telling him to "Hush!"

Bursts of gunfire again and sparks like tiny flames flashing in the darkness around them.

He grabbed her and heaved her along with himself behind the concrete bench. He felt a fist pounding inside him.

He got to his hands and knees and crawled to the pile of line. He was thinking that Clete had about ten minutes of oxygen left. And he couldn't be more than a dozen yards from the pier.

All right, Elmira, he thought as he gathered it into his arms. You win.

Ma screamed as the sound of it splashed into the water.

He didn't hear. It seemed the whole city was screaming with sirens as he ran along the railing.

The single light grew larger and brighter between him and escape. He realized three things in quick succession. He had to risk shooting it out. He had forgotten to take more bullets than were in his gun; it was too late to go back.

He moved forward another ten steps, stopped and aimed, missed, fired again and again. But in the fog the light was all glare and had no focus point and he was too far away.

Firing wildly now, desperately trying to find the center—the light's source—

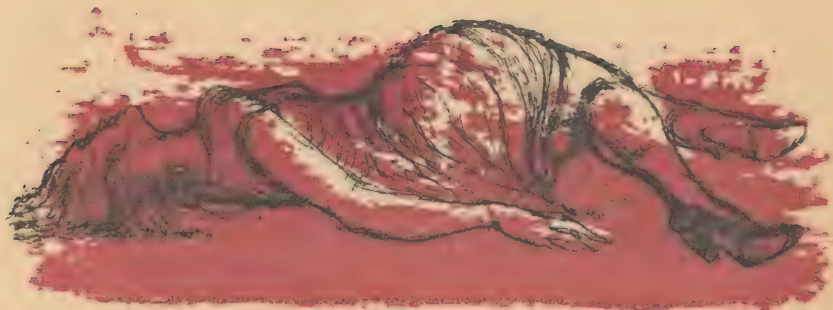
There was a rapid volley of shots and he felt the bullet jolt him.

He was sitting on the cold concrete surface of the pier. His hand moved to his shirt and felt the spreading wet where the pain was. For a split second he wondered if he were going to die.

Then he died.

Within seconds the area was full of police cars and stirring with hushed activity. A detail of twelve heavily armed policemen rushed the pier and found a man lying in a pool of blood. Thirty yards further another, an older man. What surprised them was the old dame at the end, wailing like a madwoman and tugging futilely at a line that led from the pier into the water.





RIPPER MOON

BY JACK RITCHIE

*Mr. Pomfret smiled amiably. "Doctor," he said.
"I get this mad compulsion to slash, slash, slash."*

I AM a lineal descendent of Jack the Ripper," Mr. Pomfret said.
"Really?"

He nodded. "Some families hand down secret recipes from generation to generation. In our case it is the knowledge that we have inherited the blood of that remarkable, and yet unknown, man."

Some of my patients choose to lie on the couch. Pomfret was one of them and now he lay with his hands folded happily over his small paunch.

He took a single sheet of paper

out of the breast pocket of his coat. "Would you like to see my family tree?"

I had expected something as complex as the lineage of the Jukes or the Kallikaks, but his ancestry was a tree without branches. A succession of only sons led back to a nineteenth century bookkeeper.

I studied Pomfret again. He had mild blue, slightly vacuous eyes and he was evidently at home in his recumbent position.

"Mr. Pomfret," I said. "Have you ever been analyzed before?"

He hesitated. "Well . . . yes."

"How many times?"

"Four."

"And why did you leave your previous psychiatrists?"

"When I felt I no longer needed them."

It was my suspicion that he had done so when he had caught them yawning, however I said, "But now you've come to me?"

"Well . . . after a while I find myself slipping again."

"Slipping? How?"

"I get this mad compulsion to slash, slash, slash." He turned his head toward me and smiled amiably.

"Doctor, you must help me. You must."

The phone at my elbow rang and I picked it up.

It was Henry Wilkerson and his hysterical voice carried well into the room. "Doctor, I'm on the twelfth floor of the Tarleton Building and I'm going to jump!"

"Is that right," I said. "And why did you phone me?"

Perhaps he blinked and there was a momentary silence on the line. "Doctor, aren't you going to *try* to talk me out of it?"

"I never interfere with the free self-expression of any of my patients."

Another silence. "I said the *twelfth* floor. That's pretty high up."

"I understand your reluctance. Perhaps if you tried it from the eleventh?"

He seemed to be fighting tears.

"Doctor, you're *no* help at all." He hung up.

Pomfret had risen to a sitting position, his eyes round. "Just what kind of a psychiatrist are you anyway?"

"Cold-blooded and competent. Also I happen to know that the Tarleton Building is only eight stories high. He probably called from a phone booth at ground level." And further, though I did not tell Pomfret, I did not particularly care whether Wilkerson jumped to his death or not. "Mr. Pomfret," I said. "You may lie down again."

He did so with a trace of reluctance.

"Mr. Pomfret, are you married?"

"No."

"Living with a maiden aunt?"

"With my elder sister. She's a spinster."

I considered that answer close enough to have been a vindication of my guess. "Do you have any other hobbies?"

"Other hobbies?"

Besides having yourself psychoanalyzed, I had meant, but I rephrased the question. "Do you have any hobbies?"

"No. I used to smoke, but I gave that up after reading some articles."

I put his name on the top of a blank sheet of paper and clicked my ball point pen into readiness. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

He closed his eyes and relaxed. "Where should I begin?"

"Where do you usually?"

"With my first impression. I was eighteen months old and got car sick. It was a 1924 Essex."

There was a certain narcotic element to Pomfret's voice and I found myself drifting into thought. When I returned some thirty minutes later, Pomfret was in the midst of reciting one of his most traumatic childhood experiences when he had stolen a pencil-sharpener from a dime-store counter.

I interrupted. "When do you get this mad impulse to slash, slash, slash?"

"On foggy nights. When the moon is full."

"If it is foggy, how do you know the moon is full?"

He blushed at the obstacle of logic. "I just *feel* that it's full."

"And *have* you ever slashed, slashed, slashed?"

"Well . . . no." He rallied. "But it is *truly* a wild, mad impulse. *Very* hard to resist."

I doubted whether Pomfret was capable of a wild, mad impulse. Without great danger of error, I thought I could slip Pomfret into a category. Man desires some distinction, real or imaginary, to lift him above the humdrum. In the case of Pomfret, he chose to regard himself as a descendent of Jack the Ripper and capable of similar actions. "Mr. Pomfret," I said. "How do you *know* you are a descendent of the real Jack the Ripper?"

He smiled complacently. "The diary. It's been passed down from

father to son for almost a hundred years."

I glanced at my watch. "Our time is up for today. I'd like to see you again on Wednesday morning at ten." At the door a thought came to me. "The next time you come here, would you bring the diary with you?"

After dinner that evening, I watched my wife, Laurette, at the dressing table mirror.

She glanced at my reflection. "I hope you haven't forgotten that we go to the Carsons tonight? Which earrings shall I wear? The white or the green?"

"The green."

She held the white pair up to her ears. "I'll wear the white."

"Why did you ask me? The green."

She turned and glared. "White." "Green."

Laurette is one of two daughters whose father possessed the sum of two million dollars. Her will is of iron. Mine is of steel.

"You are being childish," Laurette said. "White."

"We are both being childish, but I remain adamant. The green."

Though the youngest child, she had dominated her father and her sister, Melanie. Originally I thought that perhaps the arrangement suited them all—her father and her sister seemed to need direction—but subsequently I had reason to doubt it.

When her father died, he left his entire estate—with the exception of

a paltry ten thousand a year—to Melanie.

It was a turn of events which shook me considerably.

Perhaps he did so because he thought I had courted Laurette for her money—which was true—or possibly it was a species of revenge upon Laurette for the domination he resented. Whatever the actual motive, the one he declared in his will was that he considered my income as a psychiatrist sufficient for me to support Laurette properly.

I had thought of resorting to the courts to break the will, but I soon discovered the hopelessness of such an action. Her father had slyly had himself certified sane and in full possession of all his faculties by three psychiatrists before making out the will.

Laurette picked up the green earrings and began fastening them. "How in the world did you ever get to become a psychiatrist?"

"My parents could afford it."

She surveyed her image for a final inspection. "If you had a lot of money—and I mean a *lot*—how would that change your life?"

"I would lock the door of my office and never return."

She slipped into her wrap. "We'll take a taxi."

"Our car."

"Taxi."

We took our automobile and arrived at the Carsons at approximately eight-thirty.

Eventually I found myself next

to one of the other guests, Dr. Nevins.

He spoke enthusiastically. "Just wound up a conversion hysteric case. The man had absolutely no musical talent, but his mother hot-house forced him to practice the piano and even made a concert pianist out of him. On his twenty-first birthday he declared his independence by developing paralysis of the hands."

I yawned. "How's your golf game been lately?"

"I don't play golf. Anyway, his mother finally died and at the bedside his paralysis left him. Well-adjusted now. Got himself a job as a used-car salesman."

A young man—the kind who carries a cocktail glass from conversation to conversation—drifted toward us. "You're both doctors, aren't you?"

We acknowledged that and waited for his symptoms.

He tilted his head. "People become doctors for a number of reasons—for the prestige, for the money, because they like medicine, or . . ." He smiled cunningly. "Or because they have a burning desire to help humanity." He pointed a finger at Nevins. "Why did *you* become a doctor?"

Nevins made a confident choice. "Because I *like* medicine."

The young man shook his head sadly. "Don't you think there's something *wrong* with anybody who *likes* sick people? Who *likes* diseases?" He wandered away.

Nevins turned to me, mildly troubled. "Why did *you* become a doctor?"

"Because I have a burning desire to help humanity."

Laurette's sister, Melanie, arrived at the party at nine. We exchanged glances, but said nothing.

Once during the evening she touched my hand lightly.

I smiled and spoke softly. "Careful. Someone may see us."

At eleven-thirty, I approached Laurette. "Time to go home."

She frowned. "I do not *feel* like going now."

"I do."

We locked eyes. Then she turned to her hostess, shrugged apologetically, and slipped into the wrap I held.

On Wednesday, Pomfret arrived at my office promptly at ten.

He extended a large green volume. "Actually this is only one of a series of twelve, but the accounts of the murders are all in here."

I regarded the large diary dubiously.

"I have book marks in the pertinent places," Pomfret said quickly. "You don't have to read the whole thing."

I sat down with the book. When I finished the indicated passages, I thumbed through the rest of the diary.

Hiram Pomfret—for such was the Ripper's full name—had been single and living with his spinster sister. He had been a bookkeeper with the

East India House. The over-whelming majority of the volume chronicled such events as the time he rose in the mornings, when he retired, what he ate, and the state of his liver.

I lit a cigarette. Each of his murders—if indeed the diary were genuine and he had not lied—had been immediately preceded by a violent quarrel with his sister. As a matter of fact he devoted more words to the quarrels than he did to the murders.

And when his sister died, presumably of natural causes—the compulsion to murder had suddenly left him.

I turned the book over in my hands several times. "Could you leave this here? I'd like to study it a little further."

After a moment's hesitation, he agreed. "But you won't show it to anybody else?"

"No." I stared at my cigarette smoke for a while. "When you get these impulses, what do you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. Do you just lie down and wait until they go away? Or what?"

"I go for a walk."

"Just for a walk? That's all?"

"Well . . . I sort of think . . . dream, I guess . . . that I'm Jack the Ripper . . . looking . . . stalking . . ."

"But you *do* nothing?"

He seemed almost ashamed. "No."

I heard the outer door of my waiting room open and shut. My next client had arrived. "Mr. Pomfret,"

I said. "I would like to see you again tomorrow."

At twelve o'clock, I locked up my office and met Melanie at Paretti's for lunch.

There is only a slight family resemblance between her and my wife, Laurette. Melanie is smaller, has sloping, rather than square, shoulders, and gray cat eyes.

We kissed and then she said, "Just one year more, dear, and then the divorce."

I sighed. "Plus that one year waiting period."

She patted my hand. "The waiting period is absolutely necessary. We'll need it so that it will appear that you fell in love with me *after* the divorce—not that you divorced Laurette because you fell in love with me."

"I know, but . . ."

"We must avoid any talk that might injure your reputation. After all, dear, when we establish your clinic, magazine articles will be written about you and we don't want any raised eyebrows."

But still two years away from Melanie's millions was a frustratingly long time. Anything could happen. "Couldn't I get the divorce right now? That would save us a year."

"You must be married to one wife at least three years. This establishes the fact that you are mature, but eventually had to bow to incompatibility. People insist on mature psychiatrists." She smiled smugly.

"None of my friends are married to psychiatrists."

"They are quite rare."

"I want a husband who *is* something," Melanie said firmly. "Not just a man."

Over coffee, she again returned to a point which seemed to plague her. "I just can't understand why you married Laurette rather than me."

I manufactured my usual smile. "I met Laurette first, and besides, I didn't think you were interested in me. After all, you said nothing."

She admitted that. "I thought there was plenty of time. But everything moved so fast. You were never even formally engaged to her. Suddenly you were married."

Yes, everything had moved swiftly. But that had been my doing. I had seen the million dollars behind Laurette's shoulder and that had impelled me to avoid a long perilous engagement. One had to act quickly before the prize wandered.

Melanie exhaled sadly. "Two years. It's going to be so long, but I can't think of any quicker and proper way to get rid of Laurette now."

I said nothing.

When Melanie and I parted, I went to the public library, selected the most comprehensive volume on Jack the Ripper and proceeded to read.

His crimes, and the accounting of them in Hiram Pomfert's diary matched perfectly. There was just

one difficulty. The dates were not the same. Hiram chronicled the murders a week, sometimes two, after they actually occurred.

It was just as I had expected. Hiram had merely read about the murders in the newspapers of his time and had appropriated them for his dream world. It was even possible that eventually he actually believed that he *was* Jack the Ripper—such an assimilation is not too rare—but the fact remained that Hiram Pomfret and Jack the Ripper were two different persons.

I remained in the silence of the library for half an hour more and then made up my mind. One must make do with what one has.

I left the library, drove to a hardware store, and bought a long thin knife.

The next day I cancelled all my appointments—with the exception of Pomfret's. While I waited for him, I dissolved a dozen sleeping tablets in a partly full decanter of cold water and stirred thoroughly. Then I hung a calendar under my medical certificate.

When Pomfret arrived, I studied him more carefully. Was my patient as simple and placid as he appeared? Or did he suffer the hot frustrations of life? Was he capable of hatred? Violent rage? Was the seed of murder within him? I handed back the diary. "This seems to be authentic."

"Then you really *do* believe that I am the direct descendent of Jack the Ripper, don't you?"

"It is difficult not to." I allowed a thoughtful interval of silence and then said, "When you prowled about on these moonlit foggy nights—do you carry a knife?"

"No."

"And yet sometimes you wish that you did?"

"Well . . ."

I opened my desk drawer and took out the knife I had purchased the day before. I extended it, handle forward. "Take this."

He recoiled. "Why?"

"I merely want to study your reactions when you hold it."

He took the weapon gingerly. "Are you sure this is healthy?"

"You may trust me." I made a pretense of looking him over critically. "Now slash at someone imaginary in front of you."

He did so, clumsily and tentatively.

"Slash upward," I directed. "From nape to chaps. Imagine someone you hate stands leering before you. Your employer. A neighbor. A blood relative."

He slashed again, with more enthusiasm.

"Again," I said. "Again. With feeling." I had him repeat the action some thirty times. "That will be enough for now," I said finally.

He stopped with a trace of reluctance. "Sort of gets you after a while. How were my reactions?"

I managed to look troubled. "Your eyes."

"My eyes?"

"Yes. At about the tenth slash, suddenly a steely determination seemed to leap into them."

"Steely determination?" He looked about, probably for a mirror.

"And the *way* you slashed," I said with awe. "It seemed as though . . . as though. . ."

He leaned forward. "Yes? Yes?" I pulled myself together, took the knife out of his hand, and put it back in the desk drawer. I poured a glass of water. "Drink this. You look somewhat warm."

He took the glass and dutifully emptied it.

I picked up my pad and a pen. "We'll get on with the session. Lie down on the couch, Mr. Pomfret." I waited until he did so. "Now let me see, the last time you were in that position you were telling me about the pencil sharpener."

"Oh, that," he said deprecatingly. "I'd rather talk about Jack the Ripper."

I doodled idly on my pad. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

He rambled on and after a bit his speech slowed and he yawned. In another five minutes he was asleep and snoring softly.

I could not, of course, estimate to the minute how long he would sleep. I would have preferred that he do so for less than a half hour, however giving him too small a dose might have induced nothing more than drowsiness.

I got several magazines from my waiting room and sat down to wait.

After an hour Pomfret was still asleep, but I thought the time had come to bring him out of it. I rapped a book sharply three times on my desk.

His eyes opened, closed, and then quickly opened again. He sat up and blushed. "I guess I must have fallen asleep."

I dragged sharply on my cigarette. "No, Mr. Pomfret. It wasn't sleep. Not sleep."

He glanced at his watch. "But I've been on the couch for about an hour and I don't remember. . ."

"It wasn't sleep," I said again. "Not sleep. Something *happened!* Suddenly it wasn't *you* talking."

He blinked. "It wasn't?"

I rubbed my eyes as though they were tired. "Mr. Pomfret, were you born in England?"

"No. Peoria."

"Strange," I murmured. "And yet . . . and yet you spoke with an English accent. A definite English accent." I took a couple of obviously troubled breaths. "Mr. Pomfret, you were in a *trance*."

"I was?"

I lit a cigarette from the stub of the previous one. "I've never . . . *never* believed in reincarnation until. . ."

He leaned forward hopefully. "Until?"

I rose and began pacing. "I *still* don't believe it. It's impossible."

He rose to the defense of his reincarnation. "Why is it impossible?"

I turned on him. "But you

couldn't possibly be Jack the. . . ." I rubbed my eyes again. "You are only a miserable bookkeeper."

He flushed. "*Jack* was just a miserable bookkeeper."

"But just look at you. Physically you are absolutely insignificant."

The flush deepened. "It just so happens that Jack was exactly the same weight and height that I am. He describes himself on page one, volume one, of the dairies."

"He was dominated by his sister."

"And *I* am dominated by my. . . ." He stopped and cleared his throat. "I mean I just don't see why it's impossible that I could actually be a reincarnation of Jack the Ripper."

I resumed pacing and spoke aloud, but as to myself. "Fulfillment. That's who you. . . *he* said. Every man must seek fulfillment. He must prove, if only to himself, that he is not the insignificant creature that *everyone* thinks he is."

Pomfret nodded in agreement.

"And you. . . *Jack* said that at the next full. . . ." I stopped speaking abruptly and strode to the calendar on the wall. "We've got only a week until. . . ."

Pomfret joined me at the calendar. "Until the next full moon?"

I stared at him soberly. "Jack. . . I mean, Pomfret. . . I want to see you every day during the remainder of this week and the next. We've got to stop this from happening."

But, of course, quashing the reincarnation was the last thing I had in mind.

I cancelled all my other appointments and concentrated upon Pomfret—mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

The volunteer patient has a pathetically eager desire to win the approval of his psychiatrist. If his doctor frowns, he is shattered; if he smiles, he is delighted. During the next few days I ostensibly set upon a course of "curing" Pomfret of the obsession which he barely, if at all, had.

I kept emphasizing that he could not murder because he was mentally, emotionally, and physically incapable of such a positive action. In short, he lacked the courage. I also made it plain that basically, though I was fighting hard to conceal it, I absolutely detested people who lacked courage. Especially Pomfret.

That approach proved only partially successful, for while Pomfret had his narcissistic foible—his desire for continual psychoanalysis—it still remained that otherwise he was remarkably adjusted to his actual situation in life. That he was insignificant physically, that he was not particularly intelligent, that he dwelt under the thumb of his elder sister, these things he accepted with a minimum of resentment.

Even his belief that he was a direct descendent of Jack the Ripper was not a revolt from reality, not a relapse into a warm dream world. It was a "fact." His father had told him it was true and he had himself seen it in black and white.

Pomfret was therefore, a difficult problem for me, and now I concentrated on his relations with his sister and continually directed the analysis back to that point.

I revived the petty squabbles they'd had. I analyzed them viciously. I tore them apart and cemented them back together, but in distorted and giant proportion. I created trauma over a scolding for a broken dish, a mud track on the floor, tardiness for a meal.

And yet Pomfret loved his sister. This too was a fact that I could not destroy and did not wish to. I wanted him to hate and love. To love, to hate, to feel guilt for hating, and yet to feel *justified*. To feel rage, yet a helplessness to act.

But how does one purge one's self of consuming hatred and rage? How does one prove that one is really a man?

Now I channeled the hate I had created. It was not really his sister who was nagging, who stifled his manhood. It was *all* women.

And that was the light—the *relief*—for Pomfret. He couldn't possibly harm his sister—not someone he actually loved—but. . .

And I . . . his psychiatrist . . . *God* . . . subtly intimated that I might even approve.

Except for his "trances," I doubt that Pomfret slept much at all during the week. At the end of six days he had lost weight, was hollow-eyed, but frantically impatient for the advent of the full moon.

On the seventh day, he left my office perspiring and on the brink of action.

I had done as much as I could and nothing remained now but to wait. I spent the evening at home in my study listening to news broadcasts.

I had almost given up on Pomfret, for that night, at least, when the announcement came over the eleven-thirty news. A woman had been slashed to death on the west side. The murder appeared motiveless, but the method immediately led the commentator to make comparisons with Jack the Ripper.

I made myself a drink. Pomfret had come through.

The next morning I looked up Pomfret's address, drove to the neighborhood and cruised about. It was an old-fashioned section of the city with heavy shade trees and little known street names. The corner of Montmorency and Dill seemed an appropriately untraveled and potentially dark site. I made a note of the location and then drove to my office.

Pomfret arrived at ten. He seemed different now. More relaxed, the possessor of a certain new confidence. He smiled slightly. "Is it true that a psychiatrist is like a priest? When you tell him something he's not allowed to repeat it to anyone? Not even the police?"

"We do keep confidences," I said. "However not to that extent." I laughed lightly. "If someone told me that he had just committed a murder, for instance, I'd be obliged

to turn the information over to the police immediately."

He seemed disappointed. He tried a side gambit. "Did you read the morning paper?"

"No." I poured a glass of water and pushed it toward him. "You look tired and thirsty."

He took the glass. "I seem to be drinking an awful lot of water here." He finished the glass and lay down on the couch. "Do you suppose I'll fall into a trance again? It's been pretty regular."

"We shall see."

He appeared suddenly worried. "Suppose I say something in my trance about murdering somebody. Recently. Would you go to the police?"

"Of course not," I reassured him. "Words spoken in a trance are not admissible as evidence in a court. Against the Fourth and Fifth Amendments."

When he woke an hour later, he quickly asked, "Did I say anything about a murder?"

"No."

He scratched his head. "I dreamed . . . I mean I *thought* I said something about last night."

"No." I looked puzzled. "But you did say a few other things. Really nothing much, except that you kept repeating, 'The moon is still full tonight.'"

His eyes went toward the calendar. "It is?"

"Yes. And you kept repeating two names. One of them was Montmor-

ency. Does that mean anything to you? A town? A person? A tart red cherry?"

He gave it thought.

"The other name was Dill," I said. "Montmorency and Dill."

A light dawned in his eyes.

"And you kept saying, 'It is destiny. It is destiny.'"

He nodded sagely. "Destiny is a pretty important thing." He smiled to himself and repeated the message. "*The moon is still full tonight. Montmorency and Dill. It is destiny.*" He frowned. "Did I mention anything else? Like a time?"

"I forgot," I said hastily. "You did mumble something about eleven in the evening."

When he left the office, he looked at me and spoke slyly. "Be sure to read tomorrow morning's paper. A fellow really ought to keep up with the news."

In the evening, Laurette and I got into our car for the drive to the party the Newmans were giving.

"Are you taking the 27th or the 35th Street viaduct?" she asked.

"The 27th."

"I prefer the 35th."

"All right. We'll take the 35th."

She looked at me. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"I simply do not feel inclined to argue tonight."

Sometime during that evening, at about ten-thirty, I would disappear for a moment, and when I returned I would draw Laurette aside. "I just had a phone call. Or rather it was

actually for you, but the maid misunderstood and got me."

"What was it?"

"Betty Nelson. She phoned our apartment and Clara told her we'd be here."

"I thought Betty was in Europe."

"Evidently she returned. She seemed quite agitated."

"What was wrong?"

"She wouldn't tell me. But she said that she wanted to see you immediately. Alone. I wasn't to come with you. At the corner of Montmorency and Dill. She said it was terribly important."

Laurette would frown. "She didn't give any hint as to what it's all about?"

"No. But she said for you to hurry. She would be there at eleven."

And since Betty was her best friend, Laurette would take our car and go.

What would I do about Pomfret after tonight?

I thought I could handle that. A few more of his trances and I would convince him that Jack the Ripper was satiated for this generation, at least.

Now I turned the car onto the 35th Street viaduct.

"Let me feel your forehead," Laurette asked.

"I am *perfectly* all right."

Laurette was silent until we left the viaduct. "Most people think I'm a strong personality, but actually I've never won an argument with you until now."

"Congratulations."

"I mean that most people think that I dominated my sister and my father. Actually that wasn't true. My manner was simply a sort of self-defense to prevent being subjugated. Melanie was the dominant member of the family."

I had suspected that ever since I've begun seeing Melanie. Naturally I had had to bend my own personality to some extent in order to create a favorable impression with her, but I had the uneasy suspicion that after our marriage I might have difficulty preserving my intellectual and emotional independence. Melanie was not obviously forceful, but she had the patience and wearing power of a leech. Laurette was much easier to deal with.

"Tell me," Laurette said. "If you had it to do all over again—and knew who was getting the money—whom would you marry, Melanie or me?"

"It seems to be getting foggy tonight."

Laurette smiled slightly. "Then let me put it this way. If both of us had the same amount of money, just whom would you choose?"

I spoke without hesitation. "You, of course."

Laurette was quietly thoughtful the rest of the trip and when I parked near the Newmar residence, she touched my arm. "Money means an awful lot to you, doesn't it?"

"Of course."

"And frankly, it means a lot to

me too. Much more than you might think. As a matter of fact, I've thought of killing Melanie."

I helped Laurette out of the car. "What good would that do?"

"Quite a bit. I happen to know that Melanie hasn't made out a will. If she died now, the entire estate would go to me."

At ten-thirty, I went upstairs to one of the Newman bedrooms and used the phone. "Melanie," I said.

"I must see you right away. I can't

explain why now, but it's dreadfully important. It means our entire future."

"All right, dear," she said. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Montmorency and Dill. I happen to be attending a party in the neighborhood and I can slip out for a moment."

At eleven o'clock I looked across the room at Laurette and silently toasted two million dollars and Pomfret the Ripper.



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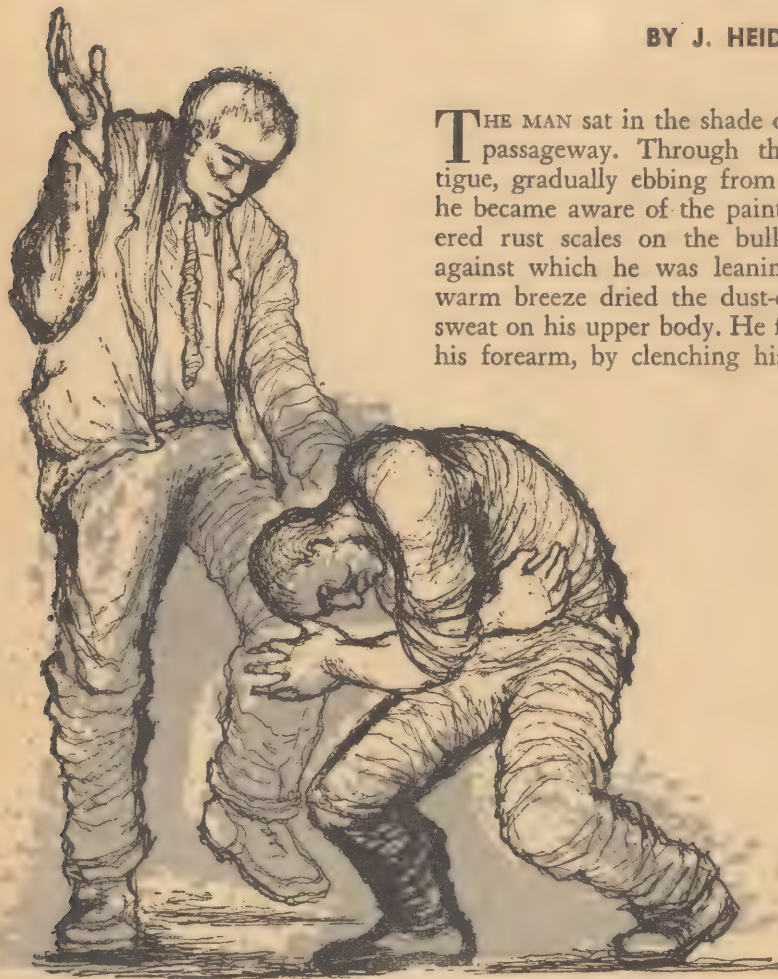
ZONE _____

Owens gave Hegan one hundred bucks to get the package off the ship. The package was hot alright. Hegan decided to play it cool.

THE SEA-GULL

BY J. HEIDLOFF

THE MAN sat in the shade of the passageway. Through the fatigue, gradually ebbing from him, he became aware of the paint covered rust scales on the bulkhead against which he was leaning. A warm breeze dried the dust-caked sweat on his upper body. He flexed his forearm, by clenching his fist,



and below the bristle of half hidden hair, a scab on his knuckle cracked open and a bead of blood welled out. A mosquito passed his ear, probed, unsuccessfully at the dust covered body, and finally whined its exasperation and disappeared in its own speed.

Nearing forty, Hegan had accomplished the minor sins long ago. Now the last of the major sins could also be credited to his account. Murder! And a fortune hung, dangling from a nylon cord, in the muddy river at a spot only Hegan knew.

His mind picked out the redolence of his own perspiration. The scent had a satisfying smell to it. Years of heavy, physical work had accustomed him to his own odor and it gave him a comfortable feeling.

A strange mind, not given to tortures of conscience. Even now, after the betrayal and murder of Owens, the only awareness was one of impatience. A hurry to end the known and unknown consequences of his actions.

The mind had interpreted the opportunity and brought the heavy right fist crashing into Owens' skull, just above the ear. It had placed his hands around the man's throat, and planned the details that covered the body.

Hegan had ordered a flood of grain to cover the corpse, deep in the belly of the Greek owned Liberty ship. A cargo destined for a tiny port in India, where, after forty odd days of sailing, if the thing could still be

identified as the body of an American longshoreman, the minor officials would, probably, ignore the discovery, rather than negotiate the red-tape involved.

Owens would not return to haunt him.

"You got the juice off last week, with no trouble." Owens had said to him, the day before.

"Yeah, I got it off. No trouble."

Owens had referred to a bottle of stolen whiskey that Hegan had slipped off a ship, directly under the noses of Customs guards.

Longshoremen considered anything not under lock and key as fair game when they were working a ship. The practice was known as 'sea-gulling,' derived from the notorious habits of that bird. Hegan was an expert 'sea-gull' and his thefts included everything from food to personal belongings of the crewmen, alcoholic beverages taking priority.

"I seen how you done it," Owens had said, "the dock foreman pulled it up through a grain spout on a line. How did he get it away?"

"Carried it back the conveyor ramp, to the plant. There ain't any Customs guards back there."

"You and him get a package off for me?"

"What you lay on me? What's it worth?" Hegan had haggled.

"I got a C-note for you and the foreman."

"That sounds too big. How hot is it?" Hegan's mind had not started formulating any plan, as yet. Actu-

ally, the conclusive act of murder, was never premeditated, in the sense that Owens' death was planned.

"It's hot," Owens had admitted, "some jewels that the Mate on the ship picked up at a bargain, over in Turkey. I won't make much more than you, and it's safe as Jesus for a sea-guller like you."

Hegan had given up close alliances years ago. He had no friends, wanted none. A drinking companion occasionally, a woman once in a while, no more. Owens had almost been a friend, not quite. No one ever was, not quite.

He had taken the packet in number four hold. Deep in the rusty guts of the ship, he had killed a man, and wheat, roaring at thousands of bushels per hour, had buried him quickly.

Hegan, carrying the package in his clothing bag, had walked across to the pier. The disinterested gangway watch did not look up from his magazine. The longshoreman did not look toward the Customs guards, but walked to the opposite end of the pier.

After washing at a large hydrant, Hegan stepped behind a trimming machine and eased himself over the concrete curb. He balanced along the beams to the water, twenty feet below, and secured the package to a submerged piling. The packet had been enclosed in a sample bag, that would not dissolve, until he could return for the prize. The river water could not harm the jewels.

As he left the water and crawled back along the beams, his foot slipped in some rotten grain, spilled long ago. The smell of decay assailed his nostrils and he shivered, not looking at the mass of wriggling maggots that he knew were writhing in the filth. No one had noticed his absence from the pier.

Hegan was disgusted with himself, three days later, when the man accosted him at the bar. He had known that someone would approach him, but cursed his heart for leaping when it actually took place.

"Owens was to give you a package." It was a small rat-faced man, dressed like a pimp. The tiny hair line mustache accentuated the rodent look about him.

"I wouldn't know what you mean, Cap," Hegan said.

"I mean, like the dock foreman was to bring it here and he says he never heard of it. We can't find Owens. He was to give it to you.

"Owens ain't give me nothing. He must of took it with him."

The rat-faced man's smile had no warmth. The yellow front teeth barely peeping through the invisible lips.

"Maybe. Just maybe he did. It don't figure, and he never pulled anything like that before, but maybe." The man left the bar, but he also left the impression that he would see Hegan again.

Hegan walked to the pin-ball machine and let the profitless click and roll of the steel balls calm his nerves.

After several drinks, he left for his apartment.

It wasn't much of an apartment, just a room and bath, seven bucks a week. It wasn't in much of a neighborhood, either. Mixed colors and races, hustlers and whores. Hegan spotted the rat-faced man, just before he started up the front steps. The two men with him were monstrous in the gloom. Hegan knew what was going to happen and stepped forward to meet it.

He swung his heavy right hand at the nearest of the pair. The goon dropped his chin, like a pro, and took the blow on a hard, close-cropped skull. Hegan's right fist exploded, sending a lightning bolt of pain up his arm. The goon threw a short, hard punch, about three inches below Hegan's belt, and followed with a rabbit punch as Hegan began to fall. The two men worked quietly and efficiently, their labors punctuated by grunts, as they traded off, methodically working over every inch of Hegan's body.

Only once, as he lay on his back did Hegan get to do any damage. He swung his toe, sharply into the crotch of one of the men, and got a little satisfaction from the high pitched squeal he had elicited. The satisfaction was short-lived, however, and the deadening liquid night of unconsciousness began to settle over him.

Once he was aware of Rat-face, sitting on his chest, bouncing his head against the pavement, not hard.

"The package, man, the package." The voice repeated the words, softly, over and over.

Hegan opened his eyes.

"Never seen no package," he was able to mumble through the blood and torn flesh of his mouth, "no package."

A heavy foot caught him in the back of the neck and the last he heard was the crack of lashed vertebrae.

Sometime during the night, a Negro neighbor helped Hegan to his room. The next day he made it to a doctor, an acquaintance, who set the hand and took some stitches. The hand was encased in a metal reinforced cast, and Hegan smiled wryly to himself as he thought what that cast would do, the first time he hit someone with it.

He rested and gathered strength for several days. It had been one hell of a beating, but he had felt worse. He couldn't work, but he frequented the bar where the longshoremen hung out, where he had first met the rat-faced man.

A week later, Rat-face entered the bar, one of the bruisers in tow. Hegan hoped to God that the other bastard was ruptured for life.

The two men hesitated when they spotted Hegan, but Hegan swung from his stool and brought the heavy cast against the goon's jaw. The man fell like a bag of cement, never twitched.

The waitress, accustomed to fights, started to the telephone.

"No trouble, baby. All over, we go outside."

He dragged the unconscious man out the door. Rat-face followed, his hand in the pocket of his jacket. In the darkness, near the bar, Hegan dropped the legs of his burden and turned to the rat-faced man.

"You packin' heat, you going to have to use it. I ain't takin' any more beatin' from you son's-of-bitches."

"Hell, man," Rat-face whined, "we ain't worried about you none. All we doing is looking for Owens."

"Well, I ain't seen Owens, and I ain't seen your damn package. But if I see you again, I'm going to do something I ain't never done before. I am going to yell fuzz, and I got a hunch you can't stand any cops in this thing."

"Look, man," he was told, "that package is worth a quarter million in the right hands. It had pure heroin in it and the big boys want it bad. You holler for the 'man' and you take a walk on the bottom of the river."

The bruises and patches on

Hegan's face probably saved his life. The blood, rushing from his head, would have told the man that something was wrong. Hegan agreed to watch for Owens, helped the man load the unconscious form into his auto and watched as Rat-face drove away.

Later, as Hegan sat on the concrete curbing of the pier, catching his breath, he thought how curiously open the river seemed, with no ship moored at the dock. There were no lights on and the wharf was empty. A cool breeze kept the mosquitos away and the only sound was the lap of waves against the pilings. Owens had figured that he would not bring narcotics ashore. Not for any hundred bucks.

Hegan had climbed down the beams and pulled the rope from the water. The package had been flat, dissolved, and he had cut the line, letting the whole thing plop and disappear in the brown water.

It had been a little hard, climbing back up to the pier, because of the cast on his hand.



They were a small but powerful gang. They worked on the owners of small cafes and roadhouses. They beat my partner to death before my eyes.

shake-down

BY DEAN BALL

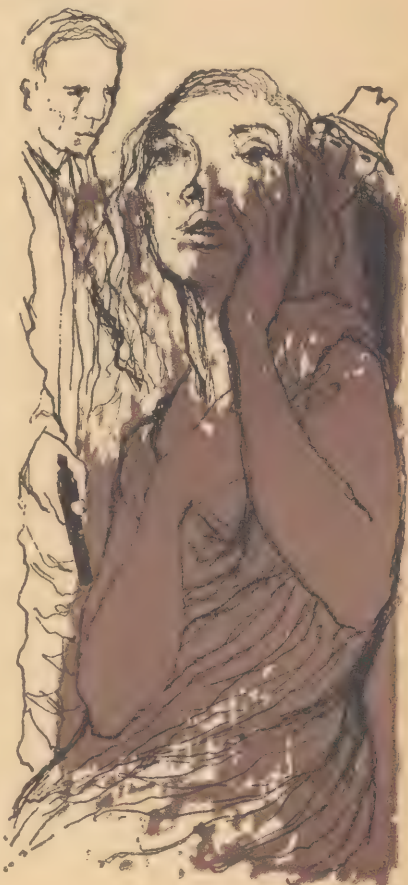
THE THREE of them came into the office from the door leading to the bar. One of them was a little runt, another was big and fat, and the third was somewhere in between the other two. All of them wore hats.

Each one of them had a gun in his hand.

I glanced at Eddie, sitting behind the desk. His face was turning as gray as his hair. Connie, lounging in the chair over in the corner, gave a little gasp and then carefully put her drink down on the table next to her chair. Two bright spots of color glowed in her cheeks. I couldn't tell how I looked, but I knew there was a sudden feeling of tightness in my chest.

I started to get out of my chair. "If it's money you want, we don't have any here," I said.

They ignored me. The fat guy shoved me back into the chair before I even got halfway out of it, and then the other two stood in front of Connie and me, their guns held steady.



"How'd you get in here?" I asked, and the fat guy chuckled. It was a question that didn't need any answering. Outside in the bar there were only Charley, the bespectacled little cashier; Phil, the bartender; and Sharon the waitress. None of them could have stopped these three. Probably they were all too busy to notice them walking into the office. Even if they had noticed, they wouldn't have thought much of it—and the customers certainly wouldn't pay any attention.

The fat guy shoved his gun into a shoulder holster and walked in back of the desk. He reached out a big paw for Eddie, grabbed him by one of his lapels, and yanked him right out of the chair.

He stood Eddie up in front of the desk, still holding the lapel in his big fist. He was a big guy all around—tall, huge shoulders, and with probably plenty of muscle underneath all his fat.

"We warned you," he said to Eddie.

I started to get up out of my chair again, but the little runt standing in front of me cocked the hammer on his gun. The click sounded loud in the stillness of the room, and I sat back in the chair.

"What is it, Eddie? I said. "What's this all about?"

Eddie never took his eyes off the fat guy. "It's all right, Jay," he said to me. "It's all right."

The fat guy let go of Eddie's lapel, and even before his hand had

dropped to his side, his other hand had come up in a wide, sweeping arc that caught Eddie on the side of the face and sent him spinning around until he was resting face down on the desk.

The two men holding the guns never even turned around to look.

The fat guy reached for Eddie again. He hauled him up from the desk and then slammed his fist into Eddie's middle. I heard the breath come out of Eddie like a long, loud sigh. Then he groaned, but the fat guy didn't give him a moment's rest.

He put a hand under Eddie's chin, held it steady, and hit him in the face with his other hand. Blood spurted from Eddie's nose. He tried to turn his head away, but the next punch caught him in exactly the same spot. Eddie gave a sort of strangled cry and started to slump to the floor.

The fat guy held him up with one hand and began hitting him with the other. Outside of the muffled sound of the juke box coming from behind the closed door to the bar, the only other thing we could hear was the sound of the fat guy's fist slamming into Eddie's face.

He raised his fist again and again in a sort of regular rhythm, and after awhile, I could see blood all over the fat guy's knuckles.

He shifted hands then, held Eddie up with the other hand and went on hitting him. I watched his arm rising and falling, saw the muscles moving smoothly under his coat

each time his fist jarred into Eddie's face.

Finally, it was all over. The fat guy let go of Eddie and let him slump down to the floor. Eddie landed on his side and then rolled over on his stomach, his face pressed into the floor, the blood already beginning to form a little puddle around his head.

The fat guy turned to me and took out his handkerchief and started wiping his hands on it. "This is a nice little roadhouse you've got here," he said to me. "If you want to keep on seeing it, take a lesson from your partner over there." He nodded at Eddie's still form on the floor, then spoke to the other two with the guns.

"All right. Let's go. Out the back way."

He walked over to the door leading out to the rear of the club and to the parking lot and opened it. The other two held their guns on Connie and me and backed slowly to the door. The fat guy went out before the other two reached the door. I heard the sound of a car starting up, and then the other two backed quickly out. There was the sound of a car door slamming, an engine racing, gears shifting, and then the screech of tires on the asphalt of the parking lot.

I jumped up from my chair and ran to the door, but there was no sign of them outside. It was a clean getaway. If the back door hadn't been locked they might have even

come in that way and avoided going around the front. But that made no difference. They'd pulled the whole thing off like clockwork.

I closed the door and went over to Eddie. Connie was kneeling on the floor beside him, the hem of her dress right in the blood, and she was crying softly.

I picked up the phone and dialed the operator. When she answered, I said, "I want a policeman. . . ."

The ambulance the police sent arrived before they did—but it was too late. Eddie's face nothing but a pulpy mess, and the ambulance doctor couldn't find any heartbeat. There was nothing they could do. Eddie had been beaten to death by a man's fist, and I had been forced to sit there and watch it.

Sergeant Davidson questioned everyone in the club, but he got nowhere. Only Connie and I had had a good look at the three men, but we had never seen them before. All Davidson could do was to tell us he'd have us down to headquarters to look at the rogues' gallery and see if we could identify them from pictures. He didn't seem to think it would do much good.

Finally, he spoke to me alone in the office. He sat in the chair that Connie had been sitting in, and I sat behind the desk. Our conversation was brief. I told him that Eddie and I had been partners in the roadhouse, that we shared an apartment together in town, and that we had been friends all my life.

All that Sergeant Davidson could tell me was that there seemed to be a small but powerful gang in town and that they were apparently victimizing owners of small cafes and roadhouses. The police had heard only vague rumors about it. No one was doing any talking, and Eddie's had been the first death—probably because he was too old to take such a beating.

After Davidson left, I went back into the bar, checked Charlie's register for him, put the money in the safe, and then went back into the empty bar. Everybody but Connie had gone home, and she was sitting at the piano running through one of her numbers. It was a slow, sad tune, and the piano tinkled softly in the dimness of the empty room.

I walked around in back of the bar, got a bottle from the shelf, picked up a glass, and then went around to the front of the bar and sat down on one of the stools.

I poured myself a drink, and then another, Connie kept on playing for awhile and then stopped and came over and sat down on the stool next to me.

She touched my arm, and I turned around to look at her. I had always thought her the most beautiful woman I had ever known, but tonight her clear skin and her long dark hair and her hazel eyes didn't mean anything to me. Everywhere I looked, I could see Eddie's bloody face in front of me.

I poured another drink, and then

still another. Connie kept sitting by my side, not saying a word, just sitting there.

I don't know how much I drank or just when I passed out, but Connie was shaking me by the shoulder and saying, "Come on, Jay. Wake up."

I finally lifted my head from where I had had it pillowed in my arms on the bar, and let her lead me out to the parking lot and into my car. Connie took my keys, went back and locked up the club, and then came back and slid into the driver's seat.

The cool night air whipped into my face as we drove back to town, but it didn't help much. I could still see Eddie's face, but now it was blurred and indistinct, as though I was seeing it through a full whiskey bottle.

Connie stopped the car, and I looked out to see that we were in front of my apartment house. I thought about going up in the elevator, of unlocking the door, and of going into the apartment that Eddie and I had shared. I knew I couldn't do it.

"No," I mumbled. "Not here. Not here."

"All right, Jay," Connie said. "You won't have to. Not tonight, anyhow."

She started the car again, and I closed my eyes. When I opened them again enough to see where I was, I was standing in front of a door while Connie held me up with

one hand fumbled with a key in the lock with the other.

She got the door open, and I stumbled inside. She put the lights on and led me over to a couch. I fell down on it, and was only dimly aware of her taking off my shoes, loosening my tie, and then later on covering me with a blanket.

I fell asleep with the smell of Connie's perfume all around me, and for awhile Eddie's face seemed to fade away. But it came back again later, getting larger in front of me until it seemed to fill up everything in sight.

I awoke yelling, just opening my mouth and yelling out into the darkness of the room. I heard the swish and rustle of something soft and silky, and then Connie was sitting down next to me on the couch, her arm around my shoulder.

"Jay, Jay," she whispered, and I stopped yelling.

"Come on, Jay," she said, and she helped me up from the couch. The next thing I knew, she was helping me off with my clothes, and then I felt soft, clean sheets under me and Connie was drawing the covers up over me. Then I felt her weight on the opposite side of the bed. She moved close to me under the covers and began stroking my cheek.

After that, I fell asleep and I didn't see Eddie's face anymore.

When I awoke again, her head was next to mine on the pillow, and I could see her face like a pale oval in the faint light that was beginning

to come in from the closed Venetian blinds.

"Jay," she said softly, and I reached out and drew her closer to me. She was warm and soft and her voice was a sleepy whisper as she said my name again. Her arm slipped around my neck, and then the sweet silkiness of her hair tumbled all around me as she leaned over and I felt her lips crushing down on mine. . . .

We had breakfast together around noon, and then went down to police headquarters. There was no more talk about gangs and cafes. Davidson just greeted us, sat us down at a table, and we started looking at pictures. Three hours later, we had seen everyone they had on record there—but none of them were any of the three hoods. I could think about Eddie now without reaching for a glass of whiskey, but I knew I wouldn't forget.

We hung around town for the rest of the day. The newspapers just had a short item about Eddie being beaten to death, and that was all. Nothing about why or who might have done it. The gang was as good as unknown in town.

At the club that night, Connie sang and played the piano to a packed house. We had gotten more publicity than I thought, and the ghouls were coming around to drink in the same place where Eddie's blood had stained the floor.

I stopped at the bar for a minute, and Phil looked up from the three

drinks he was mixing at once. His wrinkled old face tried to form a smile, but it never came through. Eddie had been a good friend of his, too.

Charlie, the cashier sitting in his little booth at the end of the bar, took off his glasses and wiped them and looked at me and then at the crowd. His upper lip curled, and he spat out a single word: "Vultures!"

I nodded and kept on going. I had Sharon bring me in a glass of milk and a sandwich while I sat behind my desk, and she lingered a moment as if to say something to me, but then just turned and walked out, forgetting to swing her hips this time.

I had just taken a bite out of the sandwich when the phone rang. I let it ring a few more times while I swallowed the mouthful and washed it down with a swig of milk. Then I picked up the phone, said "Hello," and waited for an answer.

There was dead silence on the phone for a moment, and then a man's voice said, "Jay?"

"Yes."

"I want to have a little talk with you," the voice said.

"Who is this?"

"Never mind. I want to talk to you—private. It's about your partner and what happened to him."

I waited a moment, and then said, "All right. I'll talk to you."

"Alone," said the voice.

"Alone," I repeated. "You know where the club is?"

"Yeah. I'll be there in about half an hour."

"Come around the back by the parking lot," I said. "I'll leave the back door open for you."

"Okay," the voice answered. "But it's gotta be just the two of us."

"It will be," I said, and then I heard a click on the other end of the line.

Sure, it was going to be just the two of us. I didn't want it any other way. If it was someone who had information about Eddie's killers, then I could call the police afterward. If it was someone following up after Eddie's beating and figuring on going to work on me, then I wanted the pleasure of being alone with him.

I got up and unlocked the back door, then went back to the desk, opened one of the drawers, and took out the shiny black automatic that I had never used before. I checked the magazine load, worked the action a couple of times, made sure it was all ready and that all I had was to slip the safety and pull the trigger, and then stuck it in my belt.

It took him less than half an hour. There was a tap on the back door, and I drew the gun and went over and opened it.

The little runt came through the door, and his eyes almost popped out of his head when he saw the gun in my hand.

"Welcome back," I said, and I locked the door behind him.

I shoved him over to the wall and made him turn around and face it

and then step back and lean against the wall with his finger-tips while I searched him for a gun. I found it underneath his left armpit, and I stuck it in my pocket and then yanked him away from the wall and shoved him down in the chair.

He glared up at me and then said, "You're making a mistake, Jay. You'll get the same thing your partner got."

"Maybe," I said, waving the gun back and forth in front of his nose, "but you're due for some of that yourself."

Fear showed in his eyes, but not in his voice when he spoke. "It won't do you any good," he said.

"We'll see," I told him, and I brought the barrel of the gun down across his cheek. He half rose out of the chair and then sank back again, the gash on his cheek beginning to drip blood.

"That's only the beginning," I said. "And you'll get a lot more until you start talking—and then you'll get just a little bit extra for good measure."

I hit him in the nose with the gun this time, and his head slammed into the back of the chair. He started to get up from the chair, and I let him have it across the scalp. He tried kicking out with his feet, but I dodged them and then brought the gun down on the side of his head.

"We're not through yet," I said.

He began to curse at me, and I shut him up by ramming the butt of the gun in his teeth.

He spat out some blood and the broken end of one of his teeth. I raised the gun again, and he cringed back in the chair.

"All right," he said. "All right."

"Why was Eddie beaten up?" I asked him.

"He wouldn't pay off."

"Pay off what?"

"Five percent of the club's take every evening."

"To whom?"

"To us."

"Who's us?"

"The three of us that were in here last night and a few others."

"Did you tell him not to let me know about it?"

"No. That was his own idea. We beat him up to teach him a lesson and to let you know what was going on. That's why I came here tonight."

"To tell me I'd better start paying off?"

"Yes."

"You think I'm going to now?"

"You will," he said evenly, "and you won't turn me over to the police, either."

"Or else I'll get what Eddie got, right?" I finished for him.

"That's right." Even through the blood, he began to grin.

"And who do I pay—you?"

"No. None of us will come to collect. We'll make our arrangements—and we'll know if you're trying to hold back on us."

"How?"

"You'll find out when you put that gun away."

I laughed at him and then swung the gun again, catching him between the eyes this time.

"You think it's that easy?" I said. "You think I'm just gonna sit here and let you get away with it?" I laughed again. "I'm gonna beat your face until it looks like Eddie's, and then I'm gonna turn you over to the police—and you'll talk then, brother. You'll talk."

I grabbed a handful of his hair, yanked his head back, and raised the gun.

"No," he said. "Don't."

I started to bring the gun down, but I never made it. Something crashed into the back of my head, and I pitched forward on top of the runt. I wasn't out yet, and I started to push myself up when the whole world seemed to explode inside my head, an explosion full of bright, blinding lights. . . .

Charlie was the one who found me. He had knocked on the door and wanted to find out about a check that a customer wanted to cash. When there wasn't any answer to his knock, he pushed the door open and saw me on the floor. They told me about it later on, after the police had come and questioned everyone again. They got the same results as the time before—nothing.

Davidson started to bawl me out for not calling the police as soon as I got the phone call, but he finally saw it wasn't doing any good, and he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. But he did make me promise

that I'd let him leave a detective on guard at the club while I was there, and he told me the detective would go home with me and wouldn't leave until I had locked and bolted the door of my apartment.

The place cleared out quickly after the police were through, and finally everyone had gone home. Connie was the last to leave, and she let the others go ahead of her while she gave me a hasty good-night kiss.

"Be careful, Jay," she said to me.

"I will. Don't worry."

She looked at me gravely, "I'd like to wait for you at your place tonight, Jay."

I shook my head. "Not tonight. I've got a detective going home with me, and I don't want him to find you there when he checks the apartment."

"How long will that go on?" she said.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Don't let them win," she said fiercely. "It's more than money now."

I patted her on the shoulder.

"Go on home, Connie. I'll call you tomorrow."

She kissed me again and then left.

I went back into the club, nodded to the detective who was toying with an empty glass while he sat at one of the tables, and then went into my office. I checked the back door. It was locked. I sat down at the desk and started doing the paper work I had let slide.

I was busy on one of the books,

when I heard a sudden noise at the back door. It was like someone trying the knob very softly. I grabbed my gun and ran over to the door. I flattened myself against the wall by the door and waited.

I didn't have long to wait.

"Just drop the gun, Jay, a voice said in back of me, and I turned and saw the three of them back again.

I held the gun in my hand pointed at the floor.

"How'd you get in this time?" I said.

The fat guy chuckled. "Better tell that guard not to drink on duty. It can make him awful sleepy." I remembered the empty glass in the guard's hands.

"Okay," the fat guy said. "Drop the gun."

I looked at the gun, then snapped it up and pulled the trigger. The fat guy caught the slug right in the belly and dropped his gun and started to sink to the floor. Before I could swing my gun around for another shot, I saw the runt grinning at me with his patched up face.

It was like everything was happening in slow motion. Even at that distance, I could see his finger tightening on the trigger, and I knew that he would get a shot off before I could—and even if it didn't hit me square, the other one would get me. The whole thing flashed through my mind a split second before the two shots rang out.

The little runt jumped a foot in the air, and his gun went off, the

bullet plowing into the wall way over my head. The other guy just collapsed in a heap on the floor.

Connie stood in the doorway in back of them, a smoking revolver looking huge in her tiny hand.

She dropped the gun to the floor and then rushed over to me and threw her arms around my neck and started to sob. . . .

Later, after it was all over, she snuggled up to me under the covers, and I put my arms around her and held her tightly. She let her head rest on my shoulder, and I kissed the lobe of her ear.

She moaned a little and tried to press closer to me. "I love you, Jay," she said in a muffled voice.

I stroked her back. "Is that why you came back and shot them?"

I felt her back tense, and she tried to push away from me. I pulled her closer and held her tightly, and that's the way we stayed—her head down on my shoulder and me whispering in her ear.

"And is that why you drugged the guard?" I went on.

She didn't answer, but I could feel her starting to shiver in my arms.

"You were the one who was going to do the collecting for the gang, weren't you?" I said.

Still no answer.

"That's probably how they worked it in all the clubs," I said. "Get an employee to do the dirty work. What kind of a hold did they have on you — or did they just threaten you?"

She was shivering even more now.

I kept on stroking her back with one hand and holding her tightly against me with the other. It was a lot different than the last time we were in that bed. Now it was like holding a wooden board against me.

"No one knew that money was involved," I told her, "No one—not even the newspapers—knew about any sort of payoff. But you knew. You even had to mention it to me before you left the club. Were you changing sides then? Was it then that you decided you loved me?"

All I could hear was her muffled breathing.

"Were you in love with me when you slugged me and let the little runt get away? Were you in love with me when you watched them beat Eddie to a pulp? Did you think I came here tonight because I loved you and didn't want the police to

take you away from me? Or, do you think I came here just because I wanted to get you alone for a while?"

I slid my hand from her back to her throat and began to stroke her neck. She still didn't say a word, and then I knew it wouldn't be any good, that I really wouldn't get any satisfaction out of what I had planned to do.

There was only one question left. I moved my mouth closer to her ear.

"Do you love me even now?" I whispered.

"Yes. Oh, yes!" was her muffled reply.

I took my hand away from her neck and, still holding her close to me, reached for the phone on the night table.

"That's too bad," I said softly. "That's too bad."





*County Court House
Chicken Wire, Ark.*

Dear Ma,

Russ and me sure do appreciate you wantin' to do for your boys like Ma Barker. Though it seems like the nail file ain't gonna do us no good as we are getting out the day after tomorrow.

We didn't mean to bust up Cousin Roy so bad. But you tell him to get his own subscription to Manhunt so's he don't have to go around swipin' ours.

Russ and me gonna hang around here another day or two as they are having fried chicken on Sunday.

*Your loving sons,
Boyce and Russ*

P.S.

See inside back cover

The Absent

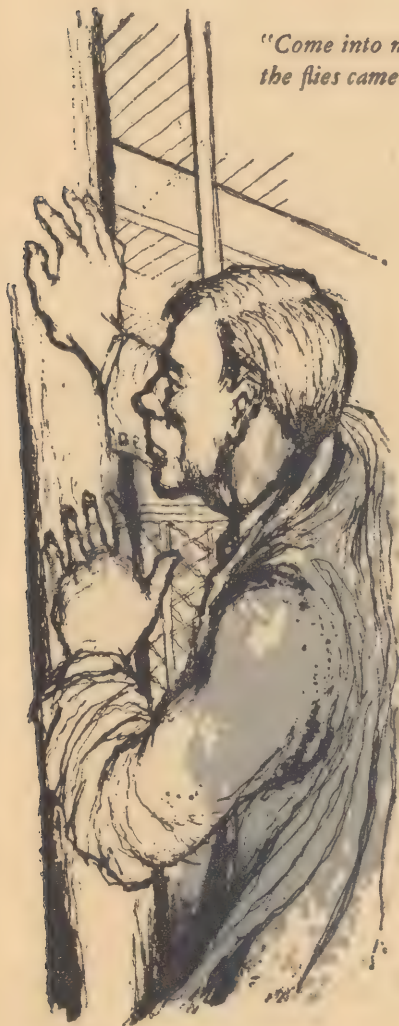


Professor

"Come into my parlor," said the spider to the fly. And the flies came in droves.

A Novel

BY ROBERT WEAVER



I BOUNCED out of my car and hurried down the path toward Old Main. I could see the clock tower through the barren elm branches—twenty after eight. The campus was pretty well deserted. An overslept student loped toward the engineering buildings, his slide rule slapping his backside as he ran. A professor, standing on his pedals, thrust his frost-nipped red face over the handlebars and pumped his way up Ag Hill. Everybody else apparently was where he belonged — at work in classroom or office or sensibly in bed.

I looked at my watch, as if looking might put the big hand back at twelve and me at work on time. It's too bad when a man of forty has to feel tense about getting to the office a bit late, but that's the way it was.

I leaned in the direction of Old Main against a February blast that was so cold it stuck in my throat. As I pulled open the heavy door at the back entrance and stepped into the welcome warmth, the girls in the accounting office gave me the look that early birds have for the late arrival. I hefted my brief case to the other hand to suggest that I had been working into the night while they had been at the movies. I took the elevator to the second floor and ducked across the hall into my office. Miss Slocum gave me just enough time to get out of my coat.

"The President called at ten after eight." She emphasized the word *president* as if she was referring to the president of inter-stellar space. "He asked me to have you call him when you came in." I didn't like the way she said *when you came in* either.

I looked at my watch again. Twenty minutes can seem pretty long when you're waiting for a subordinate. I picked up the phone hoping that none of the biology experiments had gone wrong—especially the kind that lead to babies in the girls' dormitories. I dialed and got the secretary with the throaty voice—

"The President's office," it said with the tone that suggests that none comes to the Father but by it.

"This is Jack Ober," I said. "Dr. Fiddler asked me to call him."

"Just a moment—" It hardly took a moment. Fiddler must have been

sitting with his hand on the phone.

"Ober, come down to my office right away." He slammed the receiver down as he said the last word.

I took a pad of paper and a pencil and left the room, wiggling my little finger in my ear. As I walked down the corridor, I tried to imagine a disaster that I could be held accountable for. I hadn't heard any loud explosions (except Fiddler's voice); the fire siren hadn't sounded. But these were only the obvious possibilities. With 16,000 students and 4,000 employees—120 departments in a dozen colleges—any conceivable catastrophe was possible. That was the trouble with my job—how could I keep a tranquil campus when it seemed that all twenty thousand people around me were accidents looking for a place to happen.

I stopped for a moment outside the president's office and loaded my pipe. It would look more becoming to seem relaxed. Who wants an insecure security officer? I put the Union Leader back in my pocket, and the possible campus catastrophes I put in the same category as the melting of the polar icecap, earthquakes, and invasions from outer space.

The president's outer office was thick-carpeted and acoustically-ceiled. The girl with the low voice approved my credentials. Fiddler was standing with his back toward the door. He had his hands clasped behind him in an uncharacteristically relaxed way. I noted with a sinking

feeling that he was wearing his blue suit. It was one of his idiosyncrasies to own only two suits—a brown one and a blue one. He alternated them weekly. We all agreed that he was harder to deal with when he wore his blue one.

He let me fidget a few seconds; then he wheeled around and all traces of relaxation vanished. There was constant movement in his eyes, in his face, in his fingers. He was of common height, compactly built. He had a youthful look in spite of thick iron-grey hair combed back at the temples. He walked toward me with the short nervous steps of a manager on his way to bawl out an umpire.

"Ober," he said, "sit down." He pulled a red leather-covered chair around and then walked to his own behind the desk. I sat down, fished slowly for a match to relight my pipe, and looked around the room—at the fireplace, the television set, and then across his clean desk top. He leaned toward me and made a little church steeple with his fingers.

"First, a reminder about punctuality—you know how I feel about that."

I wasn't in a very good position to argue.

"I guess you're right," I said. "The next time my car won't start on a cold morning, I'll call a cab right away rather than try to start it."

He folded his hands over his belly. "Well, that's not what I called you down here for. There's another more urgent matter. I first heard

about it late last night, and I was eager to talk with you about it. When I couldn't get you at eight, I was annoyed."

I leaned forward to show my interest.

"I want you to do a special job," Fiddler said. "It's not the sort of thing that's on your job description, but it's certainly a matter of security, public relations, and what have you." He leaned back. "Somebody's missing. Perhaps I should call the police. Chief Jaskulek would love that. But I'd rather keep this in the family if I can. I seem to recall—weren't you a private investigator for a time?" He asked it as if he were asking if my leprosy itched much on hot days.

"I tried it for awhile after the war," I said. "Almost starved, so I gave it up."

"Jim tells me you were with him in the OSS in China and that you were with the FBI for several years. That kind of experience ought to qualify you for hunting a missing person."

It seemed useless to point out that the OSS in China had been about as necessary as overdrive on a hearse and that in the FBI I had been a sort of reference librarian.

"Who's missing?" I asked trying to look interested and trying to beat down an instinct that said that missing people were for the police.

"A professor." Fiddler tapped his pencil. "Can't find anybody who's seen him since Friday night."

"Does that mean he's missing?"

I asked. "I suppose a lot of professors take off on a Friday night and don't come back until Monday."

"Not this fellow," said Fiddler wheeling his chair around to face the window. "His name's George Wilson—a young genius—with all the undesirable qualities. He's an associate professor of animal physiology." Fiddler beat out a little rhythm on his pant leg as he talked. It was very distracting trying to watch his calisthenics and still follow his talk. "He's on the trail of something big. Yet he didn't come in on Saturday or again on Sunday. Dr. Poad, the head of the department, called Mrs. Cary; she's Wilson's landlady. She says he wasn't in his room Friday, Saturday, or yesterday." He made a smacking sound with his lips. "So I don't think *missing* is a bad word."

I tried to look cheerful. "*All* professors are *always* working on something big." I almost added that there were still twenty-five hundred professors left. There was still a quorum. Life might plod on.

Fiddler read my mind. "But this one is indeed big. He's found a way to guarantee twinning in cattle breeding." Fiddler swept his arms outward as if he were Moses looking into the promised land. "You have no idea how important that would be to the university, to the dairy industry, to the nation's economy, to the cold war effort, to the cause of freedom. My God, it's fabu-

lous. To produce identical twins each and every time. Such a discovery would enable a backward country to double or triple its livestock in a very short time. And the importance to research would be terrific. Oh, it would be marvelous—and the same techniques might be applied to other animals, even humans." He paused and fixed me with avid eyes. "Think of such a development here at Keystone. Wilson said he'd be ready to announce his discovery on Wednesday. We're planning a dinner in his honor—you know, show him off, get a lot of publicity." He shook his head worriedly as he surveyed the prospect of a dinner with no guest of honor. "The biggest discovery since alfalfa and he has to disappear."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Find Wilson, quick." He picked up a folder and began to look through it in preparation for his next chore. I got up to go, then stopped—

"Is there anything else you can tell me that might save time?"

He shook his head. "I know he has a little apartment in Mrs. Cary's house on Fourth Street. I know he's an odd ball—even by *our* standards. You can begin anywhere. Now, get out of here. I've a meeting in the Board Room." He grabbed the folder, put his head down, and hustled to the door like a pinch hitter eager for his big chance. I stood there a moment feeling ridiculous,

then left the way I had come without so much as a sidelong glance at the girl with the low voice.

I stood in the hall a few seconds reviewing my predicament and trying to decide what to do first. Fiddler'd be calling me first thing in the afternoon for a progress report. One thing was for sure — I'd need to know more about George Wilson, so I hit the stairs for the personnel office. I found Jim in a characteristic posture—feet propped on his desk, slowly turning a cigar in his mouth. Jim had the one quality we all appreciate most in our friends — infinite leisure. As usual, he seemed glad to see me.

"Come on in, Obie," he said, taking his feet off the desk. "Let me buy ya cuppa coffee." He motioned to his own paper cup by his right hand. He was tall, slender, with about thirty-nine years' worth of sparse greying hair. He was loose and relaxed, and had that smooth look that comes from marrying a rich girl and living in a large country house.

"Ok," I said, "black." He buzzed his girl. She came in.

"For Mr. Ober, please Mrs. Greene, a cuppa coffee, black." Mrs. Greene took the dime with a forced smile.

"I can't stay, got an important job to do," I said.

"Well," Jim said, "what happened — somebody poison another mess of fish?" He laughed. I had to get used to that kind of laugh.

He was referring to the accident that had brought about my job. Somebody had dumped several gallons of cyanide solution into the drain in one of the labs. The stuff went through the sewage disposal plant and into Lime Creek where it had killed several hundred thousand fish. Jim had told me that in the excited investigation that followed, it was discovered to Fiddler's horror that there was nobody of any consequence who could be fired for the goof.

"I know," I said, "and now there *is* somebody who can be fired. You don't have to keep rubbing it in. No, it's not fish. I need some information on an employee. Maybe you'll be willing to look over his personnel record with me. You know, your professional eye may be able to pick up something significant—that is if you can take the time from more pressing duties."

"Who's the employee?" Jim asked.

"Fellow named George Wilson; he's a professor, a doctor I guess—workes in Ag—animal physiology—or something like that."

Jim creased his forehead in thought. "George Wilson," he said, looking at the ceiling, "why that's my dentist's name."

"I've known a few myself," I said. "Pretty common name."

Mrs. Greene came in with the coffee. She set mine down awkwardly and scalded her thumb.

"Seems to me I saw that name

somewhere else lately," Jim continued. "Mrs. Greene, will you get me the file on George Wilson. In case you find a couple of them, he's the one in animal physiology." I debated whether or not to give him the details. Mrs. Greene came in with the folder before I came to a conclusion.

Jim opened the folder between us. There was a yellow card showing Wilson's date of employment, his salary, tenure status, and the pay raises he'd had over the past two years. There was a sheet showing retirement deductions, also some letters from the Dean of the Ag College. And there was a personal data sheet. Jim whistled softly as he turned the pages—

"This guy's had good progress—good salary too. I mean for *this* place."

"Fiddler said he was a genius," I offered.

Jim pushed the folder closer to me: George W. Wilson, 120 Fourth Street, University Center, five feet seven inches tall, one hundred and sixty pounds, single, no dependents, hired in 1957 as an instructor, made assistant a year later, associate less than a year after that; 1956-1957, member of Department of Agriculture research team in Argentina; 1953-1956, graduate student at the University of Wisconsin (Ph.D 1956); 1952-1953, U.S. Navy, Medical discharge; 1947-1951, undergraduate, Texas A&M. It was a pretty detailed data sheet. He had even recorded his part-time jobs

during high school and college. He seemed to have worked for awhile at every screwball job in the country—bartender, freight handler, tripe washer, iceman—I felt a sudden kinship for the guy.

"Couple loopholes here," Jim said. "They ought to let me check the applicants out properly — *before* hiring."

"As Director of Campus Tranquility," I said laughing, "I agree with you. As plain old Jack Ober I can't get very excited. The great majority can be taken at face value. Take this George Wilson, for example. If there's anything out of order with his record, it certainly doesn't interfere with his performance. He's just about the hottest thing in the league according to Fiddler."

"So, why the interest?"

I laughed. "Small thing; he's just missing, that's all. Disappeared Friday night. But it's still a secret."

"Don't worry," Jim said with a chuckle. "Half of what I know is a secret; that's why I'm such a lousy conversationalist." I started to make notes from the papers and Jim sat there tapping his pencil. "George Wilson, now where the hell did I hear that name recently?"

"Another thing might be good to find out," I said as I copied, "this medical discharge from the Navy. Maybe he's the kind that just wanders off into the night."

Jim slapped his desk triumphantly: "I remember that name. That crazy bastard was in here several

weeks ago. He wanted to have Arlene Graham transferred out of accounting to become his secretary." "That makes him crazy?" I said.

"He wanted her to have a class seven rating. Hell, she's only a five now, doing three times as difficult work in accounting as she'd have to do for him. The Prex's secretary's the only class seven in the place."

"Just setting up a good paying soft job for a girl friend?"

"Could be," Jim said. "But I think it's just ego. These professors think they're so damned important."

"Arlene Graham, you say?" I wrote it down. "You know her?"

"Sure I know her," Jim said. "She used to work in this office. You've seen her I'm sure—cute little brunette with the turned down mouth—always dresses well." I wasn't so sure I had.

"What's she like?" I asked.

"She's a hell of a high *one*," Jim answered quickly.

"What does that mean?"

"It's what we call somebody who's aggressive, impulsive, quick to decide. It's based on a temperament test we give employees. Arlene Graham worked for me a week and she wanted to change every procedure in the office—just about drove me nuts. She's good though, very efficient, very neat." He looked at his cluttered window sill, "You can see why we didn't get along too well." I arranged my notes, swallowed the dregs of my coffee, choked on the grounds and left.

120 Fourth Street was a top-heavy brick structure with six gables and two balconies. It had been built about seventy-five years ago by someone who wanted a small house with a lot of big rooms. Paint and patches, recently put on to hide the effects of years of neglect, couldn't quite cover a brooding quality.

Through the window of the front door I could see four mailboxes against the inner wall and beyond them a darkened stairway. The door was unlocked; I walked in and examined the mailboxes: Apartment #1, Mrs. Leona Cary; #2, Malcom Mathews; #3, Arturo Gatuso; #4, George W. Wilson. There was a note in Gatuso's box. I could see small cramped handwriting—the others were empty. I stiff-fingered the button over Mrs. Cary's mailbox and took a few steps down the hall to a door marked with a big brass 1. I heard a cautious rustling inside, the kind of noise people make when they are trying to decide not to answer the doorbell. I tapped inquisitively on the door, the kind of rapid, light tapping that suggests a gossip neighbor and overwhelms a woman with curiosity. The door opened almost immediately.

"Hello, Mrs. Cary," I said cheerily. The look of disappointment on her face changed to one of puzzlement.

"I'm John Ober from the University administration. I wonder if I might ask you a few questions about

one of your tenants?" She yanked the cord on her faded blue terrycloth housecoat.

"You're from the University, you say? Well, you might as well come in. You'll have to excuse the appearance of my apartment though." She led me into what probably had been the parlor in the good old days but was now a combination bedroom and sitting room. The shades were pulled; the room was dark and smelled like a laundry chute. Mrs. Cary quickly picked up a few things from the floor, tossed them on the pull-down bed, then grunted the bed into its receptacle. She snapped on a light and motioned me to an old blue davenport. I sat and she swept the room with her eyes obviously wishing she had swept it with a broom. Then she became more friendly:

"It's quite an honor to be visited by someone from the University. The last visitor I had was ten years ago when my husband died; a young man came down to tell me about my insurance benefits."

"You're fortunate to be left with such a big house—at least you have a certain income. You could do worse in this town than have an apartment house."

"A zoo, Mr.—What did you say your name was?"

"Ober."

"A zoo, Mr. Ober. I have a zoo, not an apartment house," she continued.

"A zoo?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I just seem to attract people who are—well, to put it kindly, different. I sometimes think—if there's a queer person comes to the University, somebody tells him to be sure to go see Mrs. Cary for a room—I have four small housekeeping apartments including my own and three rooms—other women I know have much the same facilities, but they seem to get nice normal people. They get people studying to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, dairy operators or something like that." She was warming up to her favorite subject apparently. "But not me. I have to get Mr. Mathews, majoring in pre-theological rural sociology and somebody that insists in making beer in his apartment like Mr. Gatuso."

"Makes *beer*?" I said startled, "in his apartment?"

"Yes," she moaned. "The place smells like a brewery half the time. It's not so bad now. He's out of town."

"Isn't that illegal?"

"Unfortunately no," she said. "The law is very liberal. I think an individual may brew up to 300 gallons a year—for his own use."

The idea fascinated me. "I must meet Mr. Gatuso. Maybe he'll give me a recipe."

"Good heavens. That won't be necessary. Haven't you heard? One of the departments in Home Economics is doing a lot of research into home brewing. They'll be glad to give you a recipe." Mrs. Cary shook

her head. "I declare, I don't know what things are coming to. Some wealthy real estate man left several million dollars to the Home Ec college, and it's all to be spent to promote the brewing of beer at home."

"Well, Mrs. Cary," I said, "I don't think you should take it so hard. It sounds harmless enough. Now tell me about Mr. Wilson."

She threw up her hands, pleased that I was playing straight for her: "May I be delivered from that man," she whispered fervently.

"What's he like?" I said.

Her eye took on a malevolent glow. "I'll just tell you a few things; then you decide," she said. "Do you know that in the two years he's been here he hasn't slept in the bed once?"

"Maybe he has a bad back—sleeps on the floor," I said. "I know people like that."

"No," she said shaking her head. "Look, I'll just tell you what he does every night, and then you decide for yourself." She rubbed her hands on her hips. "He comes home from the laboratory about eight o'clock and eats in his apartment. He never cooks. I have no idea what he eats; he goes to the store about once a week and brings home a small bag. I guess he lives on that. Well, then after he eats he sits at his desk until about midnight. He never closes his door when he's in his room. Then about midnight—I've watched him many a time—he puts on a *red* sweat suit and a green Tyrolean hat with

a red feather and *he runs around the block two times*—just as fast as he can — mind you he doesn't trot around. He just runs hard. Then he goes back to his room, puts on a heavy robe and sits in the easy chair, *the rest of the night.*" She looked at me triumphantly, and it was all I could do to seem unimpressed.

"That's where he sleeps," I said.

"But that's just it," she added quickly. "He doesn't really sleep. I've looked in at him a dozen times and he's always just staring at the wall."

I turned up the palms of my hands and made a little so-what gesture. "He sounds like a pretty fascinating guy. We're lucky to have him at the university. He's a great scientist, you know."

"Great scientist, yes; fascinating, maybe," she looked at me worriedly as she talked, "but you will admit, Mr. Ober, that he's more than a little odd?"

I shrugged: "He doesn't hurt anybody, does he?"

She twitched an eyebrow. "But he has an awfully nasty temper; you never know when he might. A person never knows what a *normal* person will do, but an odd man like Mr. Wilson—well, you just have to worry that much more." She shook her head the way old people do when they want to emphasize how things just aren't what they used to be.

"You say he has a temper," I said.

"Oh, something terrible," she said.

"He gets so angry with Mr. Gatuso sometimes that I think he's going to burst a blood vessel."

"What triggers these outbursts?" I said.

"Usually it's Mr. Gatuso's recording machine," Mrs. Cary said. "He teaches in the Romance Language Department, you know, and he has a whole lot of tapes or records or whatever in foreign languages, and he plays these all the time and Mr. Wilson says the noise bothers him."

"Sounds reasonable," I said. "That sort of thing would drive me crazy."

"But he doesn't blare the machine out so that people can hear it. Mr. Gatuso listens with earphones, and then I'll hear the two of them arguing, and I think any minute they'll start to fight. Then pretty soon, Mr. Wilson'll come storming down here to me and demand that I make Mr. Gatuso turn off his machine. A couple times I went up, and there was Mr. Gatuso listening to his machine with earphones and you couldn't hear a thing, and I ask the other roomers if it bothers them and they all say no, but Mr. Wilson still insists it keeps him awake—keeps him awake? *When he hasn't been in bed since he lives here?* Mr. Ober, you can sound tolerant. You don't have to live with it."

"I might want to have a talk with your other tenants, Mrs. Cary, especially Mr. Gatuso—when can I catch them in?"

Mrs. Cary answered quickly like a woman who watches her people

closely. "Evening's the best time for Mr. Mathews. Mr. Gatuso—any afternoon or evening, but he's out of town now. He left Friday night for a conference in Washington. I got three boys on the third floor, but they probably don't know much about Wilson. They're sorta separate."

"Well, at least you've had a quiet week-end," I said. "Mr. Wilson hasn't been in, has he?"

"No, he hasn't," she said laughing a little, "and I must thank heaven for small favors like that."

"Does that happen often?" I asked. "I mean Wilson doesn't often go away, does he?"

She shook her head and laughed again: "Goodness no, not often, but he *has* stayed out overnight a couple times. I don't know where he goes when he does that; he gets a cab and off he goes. He doesn't have a car—just a bicycle. During hunting season, Mr. Kutz, he's my neighbor, said he saw Mr. Wilson walking up on the mountain above Center Summit, and one of the boys on the third floor says he has a girl friend." Then something dawned on Mrs. Cary; she cocked her head and narrowed one eye: "Why is there so much interest in Mr. Wilson? Dr. Poad called on Saturday—he seemed worried as if he wasn't sure about some things. He's Mr. Wilson's boss, so I guess he has a right to wonder, but how about you?"

I shrugged: "We're just a little bit concerned. Nobody's seen Wilson

since Friday afternoon. He's a little too valuable to be absent two and a half days without being missed. If he's as odd as you say he is, he may be out chasing rabbits and barking at the moon."

Mrs. Cary frowned. "Oh, then he's not at the lab today again?" I nodded. "Well, that *is* strange," she continued. She ran her fingers through her hair and looked thoughtful: "It's a funny thing now, you know, but I'm just *assuming* he isn't in his room. I didn't hear him or see him and his door's been shut, so I just assumed—" She got up, walked to the door and took a string of keys off a nail. I stood up too, trying to sort the mass of questions I had into categories. "Why, something might have come over him," Mrs. Cary continued. "Oh, my goodness," she said. "Wouldn't that be awful if he hung himself or something in my house. Maybe you'd go up and look. I'm afraid . . ."

I jumped to the opportunity. "You follow me up," I said, "and I'll look and break the news gently if it's bad." The idea seemed to appeal to her. I went up the darkened stairway to apartment 4; Mrs. Cary trailed behind apprehensively. I slipped the key into the slot and opened the door slowly. The room was too dark to see anything; I felt around the wall for the light switch. There was the bed with its dusty spread, near it the desk piled with papers, the easy chair, faded and grease stained; a service type foot-

locker sat on the worn rug. I looked over the room carefully. I opened double doors to a tiny kitchen; then I went back to the hall. Mrs. Cary was standing tense against the wall about ten feet down.

"You can come in, Mrs. Cary," I said. "There's no one here."

She came into the room sighing with relief. "That just goes to show you can't always trust your bones. I was so sure we were going to find him dead. Why I could see him plain as anything."

I opened the desk drawers one by one. They were filled mostly with journals and reprints of articles in the field of animal physiology. The top drawer contained a few pads of memo paper "From the desk of G.W. Wilson", a few dozen carefully sharpened pencils, a fingernail clipper, a carbon copy of his contract with the University, a little vial of green pills—a physician's trial sample — bearing the name Cafergot, P-B, and a Navy dog tag. There certainly was nothing in the desk to suggest that he had planned to be away.

I pushed the drawer shut carefully and turned to the foot locker. Even after the hasps were released the lid stuck, and I had to jar the corner with my foot; I was a little more than surprised at the contents. The top tray had been removed and the entire locker was filled with ice-picks.

There was something so ludicrous about a college professor keeping a

foot locker full of ice picks in his room that I laughed as I called Mrs. Cary. "Here's some more evidence for you, Mrs. Cary," I said.

She looked over my shoulder and shook her head sadly. "Yes, I knew he had them—oh, Mr. Ober, you have no idea."

"I'm fast coming to the same conclusion you've come to," I said. "You *do* have a zoo here. I've heard of people keeping a trunkful of cold waffles, but never ice picks."

"He collects them," Mrs. Cary said. "He claims he has the best collection of commercial ice picks in the world."

Then I remembered his resumé sheet in the personnel office. Wilson had once worked as an iceman during summers when he was in school. I picked up a few of the tools. They were in new condition, the handles inscribed with the names of the ice company, "Consumers Ice and Coal Company, Cambridge, Maryland; J. M. Eliot, House, Barn, and Bar-room Service, Cross Trees, Arkansas. There were ice picks from every state in the union, bearing the names of companies, most of them certainly now defunct. Suddenly the idea of a foot locker of ice picks didn't seem at all crazy to me. Here was a marvelous collection of the tools of a dead industry. For a moment I remembered how it was as a boy to run after the iceman to gather up the sparkling chips that flew as he cut the big blocks. Probably no one else in the world had thought to

save these colorful items. I closed the lid carefully.

"Mrs. Cary," I said rising, "you've been very helpful. I hope we can find him soon."

She shrugged: "Don't try too hard on my account."

I left the house, walked down to the corner, took my life in my hands to cross University Avenue, and headed toward my office in Old Main. The wind had died down; the sun was out, but the air was still numbing cold. A beat liberal artist passed me humming to himself; he was obviously studying to be Walt Whitman; he already had the knotted beard and the shapeless pants; if he could just write a poem now, he'd be in. I glanced at him over my shoulder as he cut across the Avenue—probably heading for Mrs. Cary's.

CHAPTER III

On the way out route 40 my imagination ran away with me. I had the same "feeling in my bones" that Mrs. Cary had had. Only my feeling was that George Wilson was lying dead somewhere on Center Summit. I felt like a clairvoyant genius. What a masterful stroke—to be told about a missing person at 8:30 A.M. and find him on a mountain trail by noon. That would make my job secure. I chuckled as I imagined the body lying—no—hanging—that's right. Brilliant young scientist under pressure of work snaps his cap and hangs himself on Center Sum-

mit. Bright New Director of Campus Tranquility Discovers Body of Breeding Expert. At the other side of Mill's End, near the base of Center Summit, I pulled into a Texaco station. An attendant wearing a tanker jacket came out: "Cold enough for ya?" he said cheerily.

"Sure is," I said, making a mental note to think up better answers to comments about the weather.

While he filled the tank I asked him about the trails up Center Summit.

"Depends how energetic you are," he said blowing vapor as he spoke. "Two trails up the West slope are almost straight up. You can hit them if you drive up the dirt road there," he pointed. "Another trail not quite so steep starts back of the quarry on Memorial Road. The easiest one—sorta long and winding—you take the dirt road up the south slope from Oak Creek. That trail goes right over the top and runs into the one that comes up the other side from Locust Junction." He took the two dollars I dangled, fumbled me some change from his jacket pocket; I got back in the warm car and set about to check the trails.

I took the Memorial Road around to the quarry. I parked under the ramp leading up to the crusher and walked around the lip of the excavation and into the woods. I cut diagonally into the trees and I followed it examining the ground closely. The path was covered with a thick soft moss and crossed at one place

by a tiny stream frozen at the edges. But there was no sign that anyone had passed there since the previous summer.

I turned back toward my car. It was 12:00 o'clock. I could hear the siren sound in University Center. Another wild goose chase. Well, one more place to look, I thought. I backed out on Memorial Road and followed it to Oak Creek; then I took a sharp left, crossed the creek and approached Center Summit from the south. There the dirt road stops abruptly at the tree line and the trail begins just behind a house nested in a clump of pines.

I saw it even before I stopped the car—a bicycle leaning against a tree at the start of the trail. I looked around. A rusted mailbox by the driveway of the house bore the faded letters M. L. Gideon. The bicycle could belong to Mr. Gideon, but the turned-down handlebars, the plastic covering on the seat, the pouch on back suggested a more sophisticated ownership. When I got closer I could see the little blue and orange registration tag that bicycle owners in University Center must display. I looked the bike over. The tires were covered with gray dust that didn't match the yellow clay of the road leading up the mountain. I walked around the tree looking for other marks of identification. I found them, initials on the lock; they were carefully printed in what looked like red nail polish—G.W.W. My pulse quickened. Here

was Wilson's bicycle. He'd probably parked it here and taken a hike up the mountain and hadn't returned.

I hurried up the trail. It was long and devious, rising very gently. I walked as fast as I could for at least a half hour, scanning the area. At last I was at the top. Panting and sweating I stood at the fork. It would take all afternoon for me to cover the trail to Locust Junction and come back. And that would just take care of the area that could be seen from the trails. It would be better to go back, I decided, and get a searching party to divide the chore.

Going back was not nearly so arduous, and I began to feel the cold again. When I got back to the road, I reflected a moment looking at the bicycle, the house, and my Dodge. (Then I walked through a patch of exhausted myrtle to the pine grove that framed the house. I climbed the rickety steps leading to the front porch. I pounded on the door and looked over my shoulder at the valley. There was some stirring inside—a kind of a grunt and a sigh and then the words: "Just a minute, I'm coming." I could hear slow, very slow, shuffling steps and the kind of shallow breathing that means pain and labor. At last the door opened and an old man, bent almost double over a cane, greeted me. "Sorry to take so long," he panted. "My hip's acting up." He was dressed in clothing that had run the gamut from Sunday best to everyday best, to casual, to work, to sleep. Behind him was a

chunk stove, red hot at the bottom, and a couch.

"Are you Mr. Gideon?" I asked.

"Come inside, so I can shut the door," he said. His eyes had a friendly sparkle in them that made me feel welcome.

He motioned to a cane-seated chair and painfully let himself down into another one. I could tell by the way he cocked his head and leaned forward that he was a little deaf so I spoke loud. "I'm looking for the man who owns the bicycle that's parked back of your house. Did you see it?"

"Yes, I saw it yesterday. I've been wondering about it myself." He spoke very carefully, regarding me with respect.

"Did you get a look at the fellow who left it there?" I asked.

He rubbed a gnarled thumb joint.

"No, haven't seen anybody up here for sometime—too cold, I guess. Then I'm inside a lot—just go out to get wood when I have to. It wasn't there when I went to bed Saturday night but it was there Sunday morning when I went out."

I interrupted him. "What time was that?"

"Mighta been 9:00 o'clock when I came out. I don't get up so early any more. I don't always sleep so good at night."

"Isn't it kinda unusual?" I said. "I mean for somebody to ride a bicycle up this dirt road. It's steep."

"I'm 84 years old," Mr. Gideon said with a proud laugh, "and I ain't

so sure any more what's unusual. Those professors at the college do so many odd things a fellow my age wonders if maybe the world hasn't been turned upside down." He laughed a little so I'd know not to take offense at his criticism.

"Oh then, you think the owner of this bike is a professor?"

"Yes, he must be," the old man said, "nobody around here would act like that. That bicycle's been there before, though I don't think I ever saw it in the winter."

"Now let me get this straight," I said. "You've seen this bicycle before and the fellow who owns it. He rides it up the road, parks it here, and then hikes into the woods." Mr. Gideon shook his head:

"Now I didn't say that. I *never* saw him ride it up here. I have seen him come *down* the trail, get on the bicycle and coast *down* the hill. And you oughta see him. He has great big goggles like the airplane pilots used to have, and a pack on his back. I think he tries to look like an explorer or something. And he never says hello like other people do—a lot of them stop and talk—but not him. But like I said, I never seen him up here in the winter with his bicycle. He usually just gets *somebody* to bring him in a car."

"But he *has* been here in the winter, just never with the bike?" I interrupted. The old man nodded. "Did you notice any cars up here Friday or Saturday night or last night?"

The old man thought a while. "Let's see, last night? I don't believe, but the night before there was one—I saw the lights. They shine in here," he pointed to the ceiling, "if somebody turns around in my drive. Yes, that was Saturday night. I was sitting up. My hip bothered me."

I got up to go. He tried to rise too.

"No, stay sitting, Mr. Gideon," I said, but he insisted on getting up. "Thank you very much for the information. I'm from the University, my name's Ober. I guess I should have introduced myself before I started to ask questions."

"Oh that's all right," he said. "Is something wrong?"

"The man who owns that bicycle is named Wilson," I said. "He's been missing since Friday and we're afraid something happened to him. He is a professor, Mr. Gideon, and you're right, he is a little odd." He laughed as if pleased to know that the world had not turned upside down.

At the door I turned to him again. "Try to recall anything else if you can, Mr. Gideon, about the bicycle or about the habits of the owner. I may have to call on you again."

I put the bicycle into my trunk and tied the lid on it and drove back to University Center. I went directly to the dispatching office of the Central Cab Company. It was two-thirty. Most of the cabs were in their stalls and the drivers were loafing in the office—a little hole in the wall on First Street.

"Do any of you fellows remember ever picking up a man at 120 Fourth Street and taking him out to the base of Center Summit?" I asked the group. Several of the drivers looked at each other and laughed: "Who could forget?" one said.

"Tell me," I said. "What was so unusual about it?"

"Well," one said, "you couldn't be sure what he'd ask you to do. One time you'd have to take him up to the west slope and wait while he climbed like a monkey to the top. Another time you'd have to take him to Locust Junction and then go around to Oak Creek and wait for him. That got too expensive for him so finally he had us take his bicycle along and park it on one end of the mountain, then take him to a trail at the other side. Then he'd walk over the mountain and ride back on his bike."

I smiled. "Did any of you take his bike up there over the past week-end?" They looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Maybe Chuck did," one said.

The dispatcher thumbed through a log book: "We'd have a record." She examined several pages "Nope, no run to Center Summit over the week-end."

I thanked them and walked across the street to the Dope Shop. There I called Madge to apologize for not getting home for lunch. Then I called Capt. Luek and asked him to take patrolmen and groundkeepers to Center Summit to complete the

search. After that I had a grilled cheese and a malted.

CHAPTER IV

The office and laboratory of the livestock breeding center was a low whitewashed concrete block building with green and white metal awnings. Behind it were the bull barns and the feed storage areas. The Veterinary Research Center lay about one hundred yards to the left.

I circled the buildings looking at the exercise area and the outdoor pens. I examined the dirt along the driveway and in the parking lot. It was grey—almost black, a combination of pulverized limestone and cinders. There were deep ruts, solidly frozen. Some of them were narrow enough to have been made by a bicycle.

I entered the door with the sign over it and was greeted by a secretary receptionist. She was a fleshy brunette with hair tied carelessly in an off-center bun—the kind of carelessness it takes an hour to achieve. "I'd like to see Dr. Poad," I said.

She smiled office-sweetly and said, "Dr. Poad has a visitor now, but he'll be finished in a minute. Will you wait?"

I nodded just as a man stuck his head out of the inner office.

"Somebody wanta see me?" he said, glancing at the secretary and then at me. "Mr. Mast is leaving."

I walked through a low swinging door to enter the receptionist's area,

while Dr. Poad led a man in a blue chambree shirt to the door.

"Do the best you can, Ralph. Don't take any chances, though. I'd say to go on doing it the old way. Maybe Dr. Wilson will be back. If he isn't in a day or two, we'll have to talk again."

The man referred to as Ralph shouldered past me without looking at me, left the receptionist's enclosure, and paused for a moment at a table to leaf through an agricultural journal.

Dr. Poad stuck out his hand at me: "I'm Dr. Poad," he said. "Will you come in?" He was a handsome man in his middle fifties, athletically trim, erect. He had a full head of hair mostly grey, long and neatly combed at the sides, a full mustache that ran to red and blended well with his ruddy complexion. His eyes were deep blue and watery. Some days you get a run on people with watery blue eyes.

I introduced myself.

"The President told me about George Wilson," I said. "He asked me to try to locate him."

"Yes, I know the Prexi's concerned; we're all concerned. Well, come on in," he said guiding me to a chair. The office was attractive—blonde desk, table, and chairs, venetian blinds. The furniture was old style, the kind that must have been around the College of Agriculture for a long time, but still in better shape than a lot of the new stuff. There was no rug on the floor; that

far from Old Main, status satisfaction didn't require the rug.

"Let's start with Friday," I said. "Who saw him last?"

Poad blinked; water glistened on the rim of his lower lid; he wiped it off with the back of his hand. "I guess we all saw him last—all the people who work here—we left at five. He stayed on—as he usually does. We don't even say good-night to him; he's been just like part of the equipment — always here. I've asked everybody. No one saw him after that."

"Who's everybody?" I asked.

"Well, the girls here in the office, the lab technicians, Ralph Mast—that's Wilson's assistant—the fellow who was here when you came in; then there are half a dozen barn men, a few graduate assistants, some inseminator trainees and, of course, Dr. Rider—but he's usually out at the collection station, and Dr. Morris, who stays in the basement lab running tests on the effects of temperature on bull semen. The point is, I asked all the regulars around here, and I haven't found anyone who saw Wilson after five last Friday night."

I quickly jotted the names down in my notebook. "Do you have any ideas — any hunches — about what happened, where he is?" I asked.

Dr. Poad ran a palm along his right temple: "My best guess is that something happened to him—maybe amnesia or worse; he was odd you know and under a lot of self-gener-

ated pressure. Maybe something came over him when he was taking a walk in the mountains. He takes walks occasionally up on Center Summit and some of the other mountain trails. What other possibilities are there?" He looked out the window. "So far as I know there is nothing valuable missing; he was on the verge of national fame here; we gave him everything he needed to do a job. He'd have to be crazy just to run out on it, but then, who knows anything about what people might or mightn't do. He's certainly been a problem." Dr. Poad shook his head.

I took a paper clip from my pocket, straightened it, and pried the dottle from my pipe. "Did he look to you like the type that would commit suicide?"

Dr. Poad rubbed a palm along the hair at his temple. "I'd say no. He was odd, but he was a well-integrated personality. People rejected him, but he rejected them first. I think he was too interested in his work to kill himself — unless of course he suddenly discovered that this twinning method he had developed really wasn't going to work. No, I'd rather believe he had a loss of memory or some other acute—oh " he hunted for the right word. "Psychosis, something like that. He did occasionally get migraine headaches, you know."

"I knew that," I said. "I found Cafegot in his desk, but in that case he'd have been seen by this time. If

the spell came on him while he was in town, somebody'd have seen him. If he was walking in the mountains, he certainly would have wandered out by this time."

"Unless he fell—or something—had an accident," Dr. Poad suggested.

We both sat quiet a moment. The radiator snapped. I was hoping Dr. Poad would mention it first, but he waited me out. Finally I weakened.

"He wasn't popular," I said. "In fact he seems to have been thoroughly detested. Maybe somebody hated him enough to kill him."

Poad blinked three times looking straight at me. "It would have to be considered," he said. "We'd need his body to be sure."

"It's a big county," I said. "There'd be a good many places to hide a body. It would help if we knew for sure somebody hated him enough to —. How 'bout the people here? Have there been any incidents, any arguments, fights?"

Poad drummed his finger tips against the desk top. The muscles on the side of his face contracted in rhythm. "You plan to ask everybody that question?" he said eyeing me steadily.

"It seems reasonable, doesn't it?" I said.

"Then no doubt you'll hear several names mentioned." He hesitated again. "You'll hear it so I may as well say it. One stands out in my mind—a person who dislikes him—a great deal."

"Who's that?" I said.

His ruddy face flushed a deeper bronze.

"Me," he said. "We've had some bad moments and everyone in the Center knows about it. Wilson tends to be very arrogant and very insubordinate. He is a brilliant scientist; he feels that his competence in that area makes him an expert in everything. His opinions on administrative matters, personnel policies and so on are terribly stupid. He is hopelessly inept in everything except his specialty. Oh, we've had some tense moments and if you or anybody else finds his body, I'd have to be a suspect. Heaven knows he's got me mad enough—Of course, I didn't kill him, but I've seen enough television plays to realize that I might have some trouble convincing somebody that I didn't."

I laughed. "There may be so many other people in the same boat that you won't have the problem. Can you think of others up here?"

"Well, there's Ralph Mast—the fellow who was just in here. He's a quiet sort and I don't think they ever had words. Mast has always knuckled down—he's Dr. Wilson's assistant, but I've seen the look in his eyes. He just couldn't help resent Wilson with his "Professor Doctor" attitude. Mast's a very competent technician, been with us long before Wilson came. I assigned Mast to work with Wilson because I wanted Wilson to have the best equipment, the best assistance. Mast's a self-

made man. He lacks the degree. I'd say he has learned the equivalent of a Ph.D. just by his own efforts. It's too bad there's no way to recognize a chap like that. The fact is Wilson treated Mast badly, very unfairly considering how much help Mast has been to him. That's why I'd expect Mast to dislike him. In fact, I've told Mast I'd transfer him to another operation, but he said he'd stick it out because he learned so much working for Wilson." Poad turned up his palms. "So maybe there's enough respect to balance the hatred. I don't know. Then there's old Milt Musser; he sterilizes the artificial vaginas, gets them ready for the collectors, does some other odd jobs—. Well, one day he let the door slam in Wilson's lab while Wilson was making some precision measurement. Wilson flew into a rage and kicked the old man in the shins, broke a varicose vein. The old guy has an ulcer there now as big as a half dollar. You can be pretty sure he wouldn't be sorry to see Wilson in the same stall with our biggest bull."

"I'd like to have a tour some day. If I'm going to find Wilson, it might help to know a lot about — oh the way things are done here. Then, too, I'll have to be visiting places like this on safety inspections. So —."

Dr. Poad stood up and held out his hand as if to guide me.

"I'd be glad to show you around. It'll take about a half hour or less. Do you have the time now?"

I told him I did. We went into the outer office just as the phone rang. The secretary answered it. Poad stopped to see if the call was for him, and we could easily overhear the conversation.

"No, he isn't here," said the girl. "We haven't seen him since Friday. May somebody else help you?"

I tugged on Poad's sleeve and we waited listening.

"No, he didn't tell me he was planning to go there," the secretary said. (Pause) "Yes, Miss Graham, when he returns I'll tell him you called." She hung up and looked at us.

"Was that call for Dr. Wilson?" Poad asked.

"Yes," the secretary nodded. "Said her name was Miss Graham. She asked if Dr. Wilson left on his trip to Wisconsin. She said he was going to contact her before he left. She asked to have him call when he returns —."

Dr. Poad looked at me inquiringly. I motioned for him to lead on. When we got out in the corridor leading to the laboratory I answered him.

"I have Arlene Graham on my list of people to see. There's some connection between the two. I plan to find out what it is."

CHAPTER V

Poad took me around the laboratories and with some pride explained what was going on.

"It amounts to simply this," he said. "Calves are pretty valuable creatures. They grow up to be cows that give us milk. They grow up to be steers that give us steak. The trick is to get more calves, better calves, get them cheaper and easier. That's what we're here for. What we really have to deal with is basic biology—sex. In the old days they figured you just got the cow and the bull together and nature took care of things. But they soon found out that nature was pretty wasteful. A farmer with twenty cows or less might feel he should keep a bull—be easier than taking the cows to a neighboring farm for servicing," Poad talked fast giving me the layman's highlights. "Now we don't worry about getting the bull and the cow together. We concentrate on getting sperm and egg together. If that's done properly one bull can take care of an awful lot of cows. A mature bull produces up to seven billion sperm a day — enough to breed about 500 cows. We got a bull out in the pen — Keystone Troubedor—I'll show him to you when we get out there—he's fathered almost 100,000 calves and he's still a young bull. His father, Old Keystone Romeo, the best bull that ever lived—won all the prizes, was sold for boloney two years ago at the age of 18—is still producing offsprings. We got his sperm frozen downstairs waiting for Wilson's twinning system to be released. We figure he might still produce thousands of

offsprings." Dr. Poad was very enthusiastic about his subject and was having a hard time controlling his presentation. Everything he said seemed to remind him of one hundred other items that needed to be said.

"One hundred thousand offsprings," I said. "That *is* a good bull."

He could tell by the tone of my voice that I misunderstood. He laughed. "That doesn't mean quite what you think. As I said before nature is very wasteful. We can take the amount of sperm that used to be wasted making *one* calf and use it to make *five-hundred calves*."

"Oh," I said, feeling a little less cheated.

"Still," Poad continued, "we get a lot of mileage out of a typical bull. When I first came here, the belief was that you couldn't work a bull more than twice a week" he winked. "Well, I was a young man at the time and I just couldn't believe that. Now, we've run some fatigue tests and there just doesn't seem to be a limit to a healthy bull's capacity. Fertility is normal if bulls are collected six times a week. We don't have much need to collect oftener than that. Of course if we try to increase frequency of collection we have to change the teaser animal more frequently." He winked at me again. "I think you can appreciate *that*—and we find too that a bull may be completely uninterested at the usual collection site. If we

take him to another site he's ready to go." He chuckled, "It's the same principle as taking your wife to New York! Well—you can see that it's easy for us to cull the sires on the basis of genetic merit. We get faster genetic improvement of our animals, greater economic returns in herd improvement and in milk production." He paused a moment, dabbed at his eyes. "So," he went on, "you can see that this is exciting work and important. If we can work out a method to insure twinning in the breeding process, we'll have something the implications of which may be more far-reaching than those of the Atom bomb. Just think of the economic advantage a country will have when it discovers a foolproof system to virtually double calf production. The same system might be used with all animals including people. So we must also consider as a possibility that Wilson decided to market his secret. It's the kind of thing that would bring a good price—especially if you consider the critical state of livestock production in many countries—especially the Soviet Union." Poad stopped a moment then he frowned. "I discounted that idea when Ralph suggested it, but it makes more and more sense. You know the Russians actually have less livestock now than they had in 1917. During the collectivization in the 30's animals were slaughtered in terrific numbers. Khrushchev has said that they will catch us. By golly, a discovery like

this would enable him to keep that promise. A secret like this would be worth a fortune to him."

"Or maybe they kidnapped Wilson," I said laughing. "All we need is one more possibility like — he couldn't make it back to the house before the clock struck twelve and he turned into a pumpkin."

"Or maybe he just packed up and went to Wisconsin the way the Graham girl said."

We walked down the ramp past the stalls where the artificial insemination trainees were at work practicing over and over again the technique for insuring pregnancy.

We stopped just a moment at the next set of pens. There was an assortment of cows, steers, and even a few bulls: "These are the teasers," Poad said. "You know bulls are omnisexual. They'll mount a cow, a steer, a bull, a barrel, or a bearskin rug." He patted the tufted head of a little swaybacked Jersey cow. "They're pretty fond of Mamie though, aren't they, old girl?" Mamie turned soft brown eyes up at him and coyly withdrew her head.

We walked past the collection stations toward the bull pens. The corridor was divided by heavy iron railings that permitted the barn men to lead the bulls to the collection station or to the exercise area in such a way that a railing separated man from bull.

"The bulls seem very docile," Poad said as we pulled up at the first

stall and I got my first look at the huge Holstein beast. "But they watch you constantly and they can move like a cat." The Holstein's black eyes were on us as Poad talked. "Just try leading him out without keeping the iron railing between you and see how fast he recognizes his opportunity. We have a constant safety problem here. The men get careless. They think they can walk across a corridor without closing a gate. The bull seems to be busily chomping hay; a friend of mine in Minnesota was killed that way just last year. You know—maybe, as a safety man, you can think of ways to impress our employees." There were about twenty-five bulls weighing from 1000 to 2300 pounds. The horns were removed, but the heavy head in any case would obviously be enough to finish a man.

"Well, that just about does it," Poad said turning around. I could see that he was itching to get back to his desk.

"Well," I said, "I've taken enough of your time and I certainly enjoyed the tour. Maybe you wouldn't mind if I spent a few minutes with Mast, and I'd like to have your permission to come back and talk with some of the other people."

"Anytime at all," Poad said blinking and nodding. "I'm just as anxious as anybody to get this business settled. I'll take you to Mast and then you can stop by my office on your way out."

We found Ralph Mast making some computations and recording the results on a chart. He was a good-looking man in his late twenties, crewcut, lean, well muscled and apparently healthy. Dr. Poad introduced us and left. Mast's handshake was firm and he looked me straight in the eye. Sure enough they were blue; fortunately they weren't watery.

"Would you like to sit down, Mr. Ober? We can go in the lounge and talk if you like," Mast's voice was quiet and controlled.

Mast laid his fine-point pen across the chart—"I can't imagine how I can help. If I knew where Wilson went I'd have told Dr. Poad already, but I'll certainly be glad to answer any questions you may have."

"When did you last see Wilson?" I asked.

"Quitting time on Friday," Mast said looking at me so calmly and directly that it bothered me slightly.

"Did you go home then, Mr. Mast?"

"Yes, I live in Center Gap about twenty-five minutes run from here. I take Milt Musser and a few other barnmen."

"And you didn't see Wilson after that?"

Mast narrowed his eyes ever so slightly.

"No, I didn't see him after that."

"Do you ever come back to the lab to work in the evening?"

"I have a few times — when Dr. Wilson's requested it."

"Did you last Friday night?"

Mast's eyes turned a bit colder.

"No I didn't come back to the lab last Friday night."

"Do you mind telling me what you did do?" I asked.

He hesitated a moment. "To tell you the truth, I *do* resent your approach," he said politely. "You sound as if you suspect me of something and are trying to check on my activities."

I laughed. "It just seems that way. Actually I'm trying to learn whether you normally see Wilson after working hours. You don't have to answer if it annoys you."

He relaxed a bit. "I went fishing — now please don't say it was too cold. I fish often in the winter — sometimes through the ice — Friday I fished for suckers in Lime Creek. It flows pretty fast and doesn't often freeze. I fished an hour or so then I came home, spent the evening with my mother."

"Do you normally work on Saturday?"

"Not usually. My schedule is Monday through Friday."

"Do you ever come in on Saturday—for special work?"

He tilted his head, pursed his lips, "Oh, sure, sometimes."

"Did you last Saturday?"

He looked at the ceiling then back at me. "Don't believe I did."

"What do you *think* happened to him?" I said. "You know, just a wild guess. You knew him in his working moods."

He eyed me with just a trace of contempt. "I don't believe the situation calls for 'wild' guesses. I'm no scientist, but I have enough respect for the method to refrain from gimmicks."

I shrugged. "I thought the scientist just does his damndest with his mind, and in the absence of facts he begins anywhere."

"In that case," Mast said readily, "I do have a feeling. I think he ran away — absconded — sold out to the other side."

"You mean the Russians," I said.

He laughed, "Or Ohio State, the other side could be anybody with a price."

"Dr. Poad hinted the same thing," I said. "Why do you feel that he may have run away?"

Mast grinned a kind of one-up grin.

"It's a wild guess—no reason—"

"Tell me," I said suddenly, "what kind of a fellow is Wilson?"

He didn't hesitate. "He was an excellent scientist. I learned a lot from him."

"And as a man?"

"He was something of a bastard. I'll give you a dollar for every person you can find who liked him."

"Who would you say hated him the most—Dr. Poad, Milt Musser or you?"

He tilted his head as if that helped him to see me better. "I can't speak for them," he said. "As for me, I can honestly say I didn't hate him."

I waited about as long as it takes

to count ten. Then I said, "Did Wilson ever ride his bicycle to work?"

"I don't think he ever did; I believe he always walked. Of course," he added a little more brightly, "he always arrived ahead of me, so I'm not sure."

"Well," I said moving to go, "I appreciate your willingness to talk. We'll probably have other chances. If you think of anything that might help, let me know." He nodded politely and we parted.

When I returned to Dr. Poad, I found him sitting on the panic button with both hands on the catastrophe rope. When he saw me he jumped up and took my arm.

"Wait till you hear what happened! That miserable son of a bitch!"

I was actually fearful that he might have a stroke if he continued to huff. I tried to ease him toward the chair. "Get ahold of yourself. What happened?"

He took a deep breath and sank into his chair. "Dr. Rider was just in and it's missing," he said, "missing. All of it."

"What's missing?"

"It's gone—the whole collection of the frozen sperm of Keystone Romeo."

"So?" I said.

"So! So that traitor Wilson has run off not only with his secret for twinning, but with the most valuable bull seeds in the world. We're absolutely ruined," he wailed. "The work of thirty years. I've just called

Fiddler. We've got to call the FBI and stop him before he leaves the country."

CHAPTER VI

I went directly downstairs to Rider's office, but he was too distraught to do more than shake his head and mumble incoherently about his negligence and Wilson's treachery. From there I hurried to the feed warehouse where Milt Musser was push-brooming the floor with one eye on a battered alarm clock. It was nearly quitting time.

He saw me coming, but pretended he didn't. I walked in front of the broom. He stopped and regarded me with the look direct labor has for the overhead. He was a large man approaching sixty. There were great black pouches under his eyes, a sag in his jowls, and a slight halt in his walk.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about Dr. Wilson," I said.

He grunted, put the broom against the wall...not so he'd be free to talk, but because he was finished sweeping...and picked up a sack of feed and carried it toward a bin. He answered without looking at me.

"I don't know why all the fuss about Wilson. He'll be back."

"Oh," I said. "That's interesting. Why do you say that?"

He pulled the thread out of the bag and poured.

"Because I've never been lucky in

my life. I can't afford to hope I'll start now."

"That's a pretty personal reason," I said. "Most people wouldn't put much stock in it."

He folded the empty bag and looked at the clock. It was almost five.

"Well, I gotta punch out."

I walked with him.

"Did you drive home with Ralph Mast last Friday night?" I asked.

"Do *every* night."

"Did either of you come back later that night?"

"Nope, I didn't; don't think Ralph did. He went fishing. Showed me some dandy suckers he caught."

"Did Mr. Wilson ride here on his bicycle last Friday?"

"Yep."

"Where does he park it usually?" I asked.

Milt pointed—"Edge of the lot."

"That's right outside Dr. Rider's window, isn't it?"

Milt nodded. I had the feeling he didn't like my company.

We were nearly at the steps to the lab.

"That's a nasty limp you have," I said. "That where Wilson kicked you?"

Milt stopped. "You heard about that."

"Dr. Poad told me," I said.

Milt raised his trouser leg. There was a plastic shield taped over a draining sore.

"If I could stay home and treat it, it might heal up," Milt said.

"If somebody did something like that to me," I said, "I'd make him pay."

Milt smiled as he dropped his trouser leg.

"How could you?" he said. "He's not here."

With that he pulled off to the right toward the time clock. I went downstairs again to Rider's office. He was still sitting there with his head in his hands. The parking lot outside was at eye level.

"One more thing, if you'll excuse me," I said. "Did you notice Wilson's bicycle there last Friday?"

He looked vacantly.

"Yes, it was there."

"Were you here Saturday?"

He nodded.

"And the bicycle?"

He thought a moment.

"It was there when I left at noon."

"Did you come back after that?"

"Not till today."

I thanked him and went to my car.

That evening after Madge left to play bridge I called Jim Marlboro.

"Come on in an' help me make some home brew," I said.

He seemed glad for the invitation and about twenty minutes later he appeared at my door wearing a big red down-filled parka with the hood up. He came in slapping his hands together.

"My God, I think it's getting colder," he gasped.

I pointed to the cellar where the oil burner was loudly drinking.

"That thing hasn't been quiet for over five minutes in the last two weeks."

We went into the kitchen. I opened a quart of store beer and explained my new interest in Home Brewing.

"Sounds like fun, but who wants to be arrested for going into the moonshine business? I like it here. I can see the headline, 'University administrators picked up in booze crackdown.'"

I laughed. "It's legal to brew your own beer, just so long as you don't sell it."

"Oh," he said.

"Actually," I said, "I want to talk about something more important. I still haven't found George Wilson."

Jim took a slow sip of beer. "Is there any reason why you should be upset about that?"

I poured a gallon of lukewarm water into the crock. "There's something wrong," I said. "There are some screwy angles."

Jim nodded. "Go ahead, think out loud. See where it leads us."

"Well," I said, "a professor is missing—at a time when you figure he'd wanta be hanging around."

"Have you talked with Miss Graham yet?" Jim asked.

I dissolved a pack of yeast in a cup of water.

"No," I said, "but I will, maybe tonight."

We acted like we were thinking for another minute.

"I also found out," I said, "that

this missing professor is about as popular as plantar warts. I called on his landlady. She hates him. The other tenants in the house hate him, especially a fellow named Arturo Gatuso. Where he works they never sing "For he's a jolly good fellow" either. His boss hates him so much he admits he'd be in trouble if Wilson turns up murdered. His students hate him; his associates hate him. It's a hell of a thing."

"People like that never get murdered," Jim said.

"Never's a long time."

"Really they don't. They get glared at behind their backs, but usually other people try to please them. Besides, murder probably isn't the answer—there's no body." I removed the lid from the malt can.

"At least it hasn't been found. I was up on the summit this morning, had Captain Luek take some men up this afternoon. They didn't find anything."

"No meeting at the summit," Jim said laughingly.

"But I did find Wilson's bicycle there at the treeline at Mr. Gideon's house."

Jim whistled. "How do you explain that?"

"Wilson rode it out and came back some other way. Wilson rode it out and went someplace else. Somebody else took the bicycle out there. Take your pick." I said, "Personally, I don't think the bike was ridden there. It still had pieces of mud on it like the mud in the Breeding Cen-

ter parking lot. There was a thaw last Friday morning, wasn't there?"

Jim pondered a moment. "I think there was. My wife said she got some of the ice off the walk then. The temperature dropped again late afternoon as I remember."

"Anyway," I continued stirring the thick malt extract into the warm water, "the cab company has no record of a ride to Center Summit." I licked the malt from my fingers. It was bitter.

"So?" said Jim.

"So?" I said, adding five pounds of sugar into the water. "Somebody else took the bike to Mr. Gideon's house—Saturday night sometime. It was at the breeding center Saturday morning. Now why the hell should anybody do that?"

"To confuse the issue?" Jim asked.

I dumped the yeast into the crock and stirred some more. "That's the way I figure it," I said.

"Smell this," I said to Jim.

He came over to the crock and sniffed cautiously.

"Smells like beer," he admitted. He took a teaspoon and tasted, "It even tastes a *little* like beer, a little sweet."

I put a fair linen cloth over the crock. "In a few days that sugar will turn to alcohol. Then I'll bottle it. Come spring vacation we'll sample it." I poured us each a glass of the store bought kind. "In the meantime we'll have to make do with this."

"Who do you think would take

the bicycle to Center Summit?"

"I wonder if Wilson might have planted it out there himself," I said.

"In order to do what?"

"So we might think something happened to him so he could get out of town."

I told him about the stolen frozen sperm and about the call from Arlene Graham — the one asking if Wilson had left for Wisconsin.

Jim mused. "Arlene again. You better see her."

I agreed. "And Arturo Gatuso. I'm very anxious to get in touch with him. There's a note in his mailbox that interests me a lot. I could just see the handwriting through the slot but I couldn't make out any of the words. I think I better have another try." I looked at my watch. 9:00 p.m. "If you'll be good enough to go home, maybe I can do it yet tonight."

We drained our glasses and Jim left.

I started for the directory to look up Miss Graham's number. The phone rang just as I was writing the number down. It was Fiddler.

"I've been waiting to hear how you made out about Wilson. I *stayed* in my office until six. Didn't you see my note on your desk?"

"I didn't go back to my office. I've been working —"

"Well, have you any clue to his whereabouts?"

"Nothing definite," I said. "I —"

"Hell of a lot of good it does me to have a Director of Security. We can't keep this quiet much longer—

especially now that the frozen sperm is missing — or didn't you know about that?" he added sarcastically.

"Yes, I know about it. I'm working. I've learned a good bit, but it's not a simple matter."

"Well, you better get results soon."

"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities."

"What's that?" he shouted.

"Nothing," I said.

"I wanta see you first thing tomorrow in my office."

"Yes, sir," I said. I heard the connection break before the words got out of my mouth.

CHAPTER VII

I pulled to the curb opposite Mrs. Cary's, took the flashlight and walked across the street. The hallway looked the same. A low-watt bulb was burning in the lamp on the table.

I went to Gatuso's locked mailbox and shone my light in through the little slot. The note was still there. I could make out only a few words in the tiny cramped handwriting. I could see the word *urgent*, and some numbers that looked like a 1, an 0, and a 7. I took a paper clip from my pocket and straightened it. I tried to poke at the note hoping to open the folds but succeeded only in pushing the note out of reach. I looked in again with the light and in the note's new position I could see two other words: "Must see—". Well, that was that. I stood there a

few minutes looking over some numbers in my notebook. Then I took a leaf from the book and wrote my own note to Gatuso.

"Need your help in locating George Wilson. Call me when you return (no matter what hour) at University Ext. 2498 (during working hours) or at EX 7-2359 after 5:00.

John Ober

Department of Security

Then to give it equal priority with the other note, I folded it and wrote *urgent* on the outside. I slipped it into the slot and hurried back to my car.

I crossed University Avenue and drove up Davison Drive toward College Hills. Garden Drive ended in a cul-de-sac. There were modern dwellings, prefabricated but expensive. At the open end of the street was a new, small apartment house. The front faced Garden Drive. At the rear was a parking lot. A hallway ran through the building to entrances from either end. Arlene Graham's apartment was close to the front on the first floor.

The big fire door groaned as it swung shut. It certainly wasn't the kind of place you could sneak into from *that* end.

She greeted me politely, but not at all warmly. I was a little bit disappointed. She didn't look like Marilyn Monroe. She wasn't wearing a thin negligee. Her lips weren't moist, warm and slightly parted, and she hadn't fixed two Scotch and

sodas. But she looked good enough. She had black hair with fringe bangs, arched eyebrows, and a wide mouth that turned down at the corners. She was wearing a pair of hot pink tapers on which floated a handful of embroidered posies. Topside she wore an angora pullover with a sailor's collar and a plunging V that revealed enough cleavage to make a mountain climber cinch up his crampons. It was all intended to make her look cuddly, but that effect didn't quite come off. The "high one" Jim talked about kept coming through, and I could see as we talked that any man she got mixed up with would have one problem solved—he wouldn't have to worry about making decisions.

Her apartment was tastefully — and it seemed to me expensively — furnished. A thick wall-to-wall rug, large leather-inlaid coffee table, ponderous lamps. It was the kind of apartment I'd have expected the Dean of Women to have. I was tired and I guess irritable from my conversation with Dr. Fiddler. I decided to move in hard.

"Miss Graham," I said. "I'm trying to locate a Dr. George Wilson, Department of Animal Physiology. He's been missing since last Friday. I believe you know where he is." She looked at me very coolly for several seconds. I continued, I'm the one who called you a little while ago. I'm Director of Security at the University. My name's —"

"Your name's John Ober," she

said evenly "You were born in this state, about —" she looked at me, "forty years ago. You went to college down south some place. You're married — no children. You were an interpreter in the Air Force during World War II. Since then you've held a string of *insignificant* jobs including the two I's — F.B. and private." I guess my jaw dropped as I deflated. She went on. "That's probably why you feel you can walk in here late at night and ask blunt questions. Yes, Mr. Ober, I recognize you from your picture in the paper. But I think you ought to have another taken — you've aged."

"I think I'm aging right now," I said. "You operate a pretty withering blowtorch. You seem to know a lot about me. I'm sure you know even more about George Wilson."

She turned around. The sailor collar bounced. The posies darted. "I know him as well as I want to."

"Have you dated him?" I asked.

"I guess you could call it that."

"Are you in love with him?"

Her upper lip arched, her teeth flashed. "Heavens, no."

"He must be very much in love with you," I said.

She looked at me calmly. "Why should you say that?"

I watched her very closely as I answered: "He tried pretty hard to make a class seven secretary out of you. A nice piece of pay increase, not much work."

The mad came up like a gas jet.

"You're very insulting," she said.

"A scientist with an important discovery has a right to competent clerical help."

"How much do you know about this important discovery? I thought that was a secret."

She back-pedaled. "I mean a distinguished researcher —"

"On the threshold of fame and fortune — a pretty good catch."

Her eyes blazed. "You have no right —"

She was right there. I had nothing to go on — no rights at all — just a hunch.

"You're hiding something, Miss Graham," I said.

"I don't know what happened to him," she said savagely.

"Who said something *happened* to him?"

Her eyes narrowed. She didn't reply.

"Why did you call the Breeding Center this morning and ask if Wilson had left?"

"None of your business," she said.

"Has he gone to Wisconsin?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you want to know? Or why do you want other people to think he went to Wisconsin?"

She looked around desperately as if she wanted to throw something at me. "He told me he had a gift for me and wanted me to have it before he went to Wisconsin." Her voice getting shrill.

"Do you know Arturo Gatuso?"

I yelled back at her.

She looked startled. "Is he back?"

Then she caught herself. "Yes, I know him."

"Why did it upset you when I mentioned his name?" I said.

Then she turned livid. "Get out of here!" she screamed. "I can't stand you." She pushed me toward the door. I grabbed my parka on the way out. She slammed the door. I could hear her muttering. Then she got silent as if listening for my footsteps. I walked heavily toward the door.

I flung open the heavy door and then stepped back into the building. The door creaked mightily. I tiptoed back to her apartment door in time to hear her dial the last three digits of a phone number. I tried to count the clicks. It sounded like 7 - 8 - 9. I jotted the number in my notebook. Then I heard her voice.

"He was here." (Pause) "Yes, he just left." (Pause) "Nothing—well, not much, but he's suspicious" (Silence) "No, that's not it — just watch yourself. He's not too bright, but he's one of those *persistent* guys. He'll be snooping around —" (Pause) "Yes, of course, if you can without getting caught. That would be good. I happen to know he's not too well established." (Pause) "Call me as soon as you hear —"

The receiver slammed down. I could hear her muttering again, and then angry footsteps fading away.

I tiptoed down the hall and out the back door. I walked around the building on the side opposite Miss Graham's apartment and got into my Dodge.

By Wednesday the threat to me had taken on added dimension. I was still nowhere with the investigation. Gatuso was still in Washington. The clerk at the bus station didn't remember selling a ticket to anybody of Wilson's description. Ditto the driver of the limousine to the airport. I couldn't think of anyone else to talk to. Fiddler was jumpy as a caffeinated cat trying to think of a quiet way to call off the banquet. On Tuesday, because I couldn't think of anything better to do, I had undertaken a series of safety inspection tours, mostly through the Ag college and particularly around the dairy operations. I was careful to be seen by as many people as possible. Since then there had been no fewer than three lost time accidents—all involving equipment I had looked at and pronounced safe. One man had fallen on an extended grease spot on the creamery floor. He had no idea how the oil got there. It was at a corner around which he carried heavy milk cans. He'd slipped without ever seeing the oil.

Another man was severely burned when he lit a cigarette while cleaning a refuse can. What he thought was disinfectant turned out to be heavily mixed with gasoline. This sort of thing makes a safety inspector look like a saboteur or an imbecile. On top of that, two wage payroll employees came in to tell me

that their checks were not available at the Bursar's office. I could distinctly remember processing the forms. Yet the payroll section claimed they had never received them. In order to pay the employees I had to issue a special supplementary form that required the Prex's signature. It doesn't take too much of this sort of thing to make people wonder if you are competent to hold a job putting X's in squares. I could guess who in accounting had loused up the forms, but who at the dairy barns—I decided to go back and ask questions.

Dr. Rider was sitting at his desk apparently doing nothing important. He met me politely and answered my questions with a spirit of full cooperation. He seemed to have regained his composure. He was a huge man about forty years old with glasses and thinning hair. There was a flabbiness about him that suggested a distate for exercise. "I'm sorry about the Romeo sperms," I said. "The last time I saw you you were quite upset about it."

He shrugged. "I guess it seems like a small thing to an outsider. You know, if there's one thing there's plenty of, it's sperm. But Keystone Romeo was a special bull. We may not get another one like him in my lifetime. I had plans." He looked at me apologetically. "You know we research people work on little projects that we know won't pay off for a hundred years, so you can't say we're grandstanders, but

we're human too." He smiled weakly. "You know, you hate to think that your whole life is just wasted," he snapped his fingers.

"What do you think happened to the stuff?" He turned his palms up.

"Wilson took it. What else can one think?"

"Why would he do it?"

Rider leaned back, "If it's true that he can produce identical twins at will, then good sperm would be twice as valuable."

I nodded. "Do you know Arlene Graham?"

He repeated the name without sign of recognition. "Does she live in University Center? I know some Grahams back where I come from, but *Arlene* doesn't ring any bells. Why do you ask?"

I looked at the wedding band on his hand and the picture of a wife and two boys on his desk. "She's a girl in accounting," I said. "Knows Wilson. She has a friend up here someplace. I'd like to find him. I think he'd be able to explain the upsurge of accidents around here lately."

"I'm sorry I can't help," he said.

I left Dr. Rider then and went hunting Dr. Morris. I found him at the collection station. The place was scrubbed clean. Several graduate students in white coats tended the scales. A barnman was strapping little Mamie into the teaser position. I spoke to Morris.

"I'll be with you in a moment," he said brusquely. "I'm busy now."

I stepped back. Milt Musser was leading a big brown Swiss bull toward the station. The bull walked docilely onto the scales. A student flipped the weights.

"Twenty one hundred and fifty-five," he said.

Milt led the animal around toward the teaser. Dr. Morris picked up an artificial vagina and examined the vial. The bull snorted and reared up on his hind legs. Milt gave him a second of freedom then pulled him back; the bull gave in reluctantly to the painful tug of the nose ring. He pawed, snorted, and looked angrily at his tormentor. Milt slackened the rope and the bull mounted again. A quick, deft thrust by Dr. Morris and the job was done. Milt led the animal back toward his stall; the barnman untied Mamie and led her back to hers. I thought she had a very silly look on her face as she shook the little pert patch of red hair between her ears and blinked at me. Dr. Morris took the vial to the table, recorded the take, and turned it over to an assistant. Then he walked over to where I was standing.

"What is it?" he said.

I was immediately annoyed by his manner, and perhaps by his appearance. He was a small thin fellow with a square face, bulging eyes behind rimless glasses, and an overly-waxed crew cut. And he was young. Perhaps that annoyed me more than anything else.

"I'm John Ober," I said, "from

the Department of Security. I need some information on Arlene Graham. My secretary told me she thought you knew her."

I watched him closely. He did what everybody else does in these situations. He repeated the name.

"Arlene Graham, Arlene Graham," he said quickly. "Oh, yes, oh yes. She's the attractive brunette in accounting, isn't she?"

"She is, indeed," I said. "Do you know her well?"

He rubbed a palm along a shiny temple. "Not as well as I'd like to. I met her a few months ago. I went down to sign up for some savings bonds. She was very nice to me."

I could tell that women had not often showed an interest in him.

"You're not married, are you, Dr. Morris?" I said.

"No, of course not."

"And I'll bet you have no dependents to speak of."

"That's right." He looked at me sharply. "So what?"

"Nothing," I said. "Tell me, did you get a phone call from Arlene along about ten or ten-thirty Monday night?"

"She's never called me—well, not recently. Though I don't see that it's any of your business."

"Were you over in the creamery this week?"

He answered quickly. "I never go into the creamery. The ice cream sales room sometimes, but never the creamery. Why should I go into the creamery?"

"How 'bout the refuse cans behind the Stock Judging Pavilion. Do you know that gasoline and disinfectant don't mix any better than gasoline and alcohol?" I said it with real accusation.

His cockiness left him and he reacted more like a kid facing authority.

"I don't understand, Mr. Ober. You seem to be accusing me of something."

"There were several very curious lost-time accidents around here the last few days."

"And you think I'm responsible?" His face showed concern.

"It figures," I said evenly. "Dr. Wilson has disappeared. Arlene Graham knows something about that. You know her. Maybe you know something about Dr. Wilson and something about these accidents."

Dr. Morris looked genuinely frightened. "I can account for all my activities," he said.

"You may have to," I said icily and walked away.

Ralph Mast wasn't in the lab. The secretary said he was out at the bull pens checking feeding data. I found him with a clipboard and a pencil. Milt Musser was at the other end of the building, pushing a cart, putting an armful of hay into each pen. I didn't see any other people. Ralph looked up as I approached.

"Hello, Mr. Ober," he said pleasantly. "I've been expecting you back. Have you learned any more about

Dr. Wilson?"

"I've made a little progress," I said. "I think I'm on the right track."

"Oh?" Ralph said. He leaned over to examine the chart on the door of a two thousand pound Holstein. The beast tossed his huge head and rolled his black eyes.

"They're pretty frightening creatures," I said. "Look at the way he looks at us." The bull was chewing hay contentedly, but he didn't for an instant take his black eyes off us.

"They're handsome creatures, tho'" Mast said. "It's a big thrill to watch their power—especially when they're a bit angry." He shook the iron door. "Ungh," Mast grunted and he kicked the door. The bull stopped chewing and lowered his head. "Ungh" Mast grunted again.

The bull tossed his head from side to side, the muscles in his neck bulged. He came to the gate within inches of Mast and stood helplessly angry. The blood vessels in his eyes extended, mixing red with black and white.

"As a safety man," I said, "I'm interested in the problem you have here. All these bulls, workers, visitors—pretty important to have good safety measures." I rattled the catch on the gate.

"We have precautions," Mast said shrugging. "We goof too. It goes in spells. We do everything right for a long time. Then we get a series of accidents. That's unavoidable, I guess."

"Safety people disagree with that

attitude. It's one of the toughest we fight. We think *all* accidents are avoidable. There need *never* be another one."

He looked at me tolerantly. "I guess every profession has its unrealistic assumptions."

"Oh," I said. "What's one in the breeding business?"

He hesitated a moment. Then he said evenly, "That you have to be a Ph.D. to be a scientist."

That was his grievance with life and I didn't want to aggravate it.

"Tell me," I said, "when you and Arlene Graham discuss this problem, does she agree with you?"

For a split second I thought he looked startled.

"Who?" he said narrowing his eyes. "Arlene?"

"Arlene Graham," I said. "She lives on Garden Drive, works in accounting. She's got strong opinions on things. I thought she might have one on *that* subject."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know any Arlene Graham."

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "I thought I saw you with her one time."

"Possibly," he said. "I may know her when I see her. I often walk across the campus with girls I don't know by name. Where does she work? In Ag?"

"Forget it," I said and I turned my back to look at the other bulls. I had the definite feeling that my question upset him at first, but he was in control now. I walked a few

steps. He apparently returned to the bull he had made angry earlier. I heard the gate rattle and I heard him grunt. "Ungh" again. I didn't see anything unusual, and I didn't suspect anything when he said quickly, "I must run in for another form. I'll join you in a minute," he called and left hurriedly.

I strolled up the aisle toward the exercise ring. I rattled gates and grunted and shook my thick head at the bulls. It was great fun.

All at once I heard somebody scream, "Look out!"

I looked back over my shoulder and saw the Holstein bull charging, only a few yards behind me. I dived to the wall. I felt his head brush the lower part of my thigh. If his horns hadn't been removed he'd have taken my leg off. I rolled madly for a steel post that supported the roof near the wall. The bull charged again, this time ramming his head into the steel post just as I stood up behind it.

Then I saw who had warned me. Milt Musser—and he was yelling instructions to me.

"Keep the post between you and the bull. Stay behind the post, you damn fool." The post looked mighty thin but I did my best.

"Pick up the fork there behind you," Milt yelled again. I looked around cautiously. I reached back and picked up the fork and started to hold it like a sword before me.

"No. No," yelled Milt. "You

can't hold him off with that. Wait till he puts his head down; then stick the prong through his nose ring."

The Holstein charged again. This time he circled the post trying to get to me. In a minute Milt approached behind the railing with a bucket of water. As the bull, snorting and pawing, rushed again Milt threw the bucket of water into his face. For a moment the big animal stood blinking and bewildered.

"Now," shouted Milt. "Quick."

I reached out with the fork, pushed a prong through the nose ring and forced the bull's head to the ground. I held it there, my own head only a few feet from his.

I felt sure the bull would disregard the pain and raise his head, but he yielded the way a man might yield to pressure on his jugular vein. He stood rolling his eyes, snorting, and tugging just enough to realize the pain. Then Milt snapped a staff on the ring and led the animal back to the pen.

I straightened up—breathing hard, feeling foolish and scared—and started to brush the straw and dust from my clothing.

Ralph Mast came around the corner and stopped to speak to Milt as Milt closed the door to the bull's pen. Mast made a point of checking the door. Then he looked at Milt and shook his head as if to say 'You never can tell about these guys from Old Main.' Then he walked up to me looking inquiringly at me.

"What in the world happened?" he said with concern.

"I think you know what happened," I said. "It damn near worked, too."

He ignored the last part of my remark. "I guess you unlatched the door when you fooled with it. I should have warned you. Perhaps we better check some of the others you touched to make sure you didn't do it to them."

"I didn't unlatch any doors," I said angrily. "You know damn well I didn't."

"How should I know that?" he asked innocently.

"Because you know who unlatched the door and you know why."

"Oh go on," he laughed. "Milt wouldn't do a thing like that."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," I said. "You would though. You don't miss many opportunities, do you?"

He narrowed his eyes and looked at me intently. "Mr. Ober, you're upset. Why not laugh off your mistake? Everybody else will laugh when they hear it."

I turned to leave. "One thing, Mast. You've tipped your hand," I said. "I'll be moving in on you—"

He laughed. "When you learn something exciting, let me know."

By the time I got back to the office it was after three. There were two telephone slips on my desk, both from Fiddler—one at 2:00 and another at 3:05. Miss Slocum came in

to tell me—"Dr. Fiddler wants you right away. He called just a few minutes ago—said I was to get you if I had to send out the campus patrol."

I hurried down to his office and found him more agitated than I had ever seen him before. He got up from his desk and approached me with the pained expression of a general who has just learned that his only son has been dismissed from military school for organizing a panty raid on the home for wayward girls. He ground his fist into his palm: "Ober, Ober, Ober," he said over and over. "I haven't communicated with you. You just don't seem to see the gravity of this situation. I called you in because I didn't want any bad public relations. I wanted to avoid calling the police. I thought you could find Wilson—or at least come up with some suggestions about what to do. But you haven't—"

"I understand the gravity of the situation, Dr. Fiddler. It's even worse than you think. I almost got killed awhile ago."

He ignored my remark and continued ranting. "I've had to call off the banquet. Now, not only will we not be able to announce a twinning method, we'll have to explain why we can't."

"That's not my fault, Dr. Fiddler."

"But you haven't learned a useful thing," Fiddler went on. "You've gone around making safety inspections—not the kind that *prevent* accidents, but the kind that *cause* acci-

dents." I tried to protest, but he wasn't interested. "And you don't seem able to take care of the normal operations of your office. I had to sign the supplementary forms so that your wage payroll people could be paid. If instead of dallying around the bull barn getting into ridiculous situations you had concentrated on the most reasonable explanation of Wilson's absence *we might* have been able to avoid a scandal."

"And what is this most reasonable explanation?" I asked incredulously.

"That Wilson's a communist. Oh, that traitorous scoundrel. To think that an American—with a Ph.D." Fiddler shook his head in agony. "And he even signed our loyalty oath. I'll call Chief Jaskulek right now—though I'd rather lose my right arm. And from now on you work with Jaskulek. Poad just called, he says the people up there think it's hilarious that our safety man was almost killed by a bull. That's not the kind of humor that makes the people of the Commonwealth ask for a tax increase—."

CHAPTER IX

Fiddler had called in Jim Marlboro and Dale Talbot, the Director of Public Relations. The three of them discussed ways to break the news to the press, and they evaluated the Employee Relations impact of what was going on. I sat pretty quiet, nursing my hurt pride and cussing Fiddler for being so stupid.

In a little while a receptionist brought in Chief Jaskulek. He was in uniform, a big man in his middle fifties with a ruddy face and alert brown eyes. He came right over to us and got a pad of paper out of his pocket. "So you've got an absent *bodied* professor," he said dead pan. "I knew you had a bunch of absent *minded* ones. This sort of thing happening to a professor always makes me fear the worst. Now tell me all you know."

Dr. Fiddler grunted: "O.K., Chief come off it. You don't have to play the role *that* convincingly. Do you know these men?" The Chief looked us over. We shook hands.

"Ober, you bring Chief Jaskulek up to date," Fiddler said.

I related the essentials of what I had been up to—The visit to Mrs. Cary, the trip to Center Summit, my talks with Poad and the others in the Breeding Center, my visit to Arlene Graham's apartment, my close call with the Holstein bull. I left out material that was too tenuous, such as the notes to Gatuso, the several ways the bicycle might have been taken to Center Summit, and my own guesses as to who was involved to what extent, my estimate of the number of clicks I had heard on Miss Graham's phone — things like that. I didn't even try to make it look as if I had been framed on the accident reports and payroll forms, but I did say that I felt that Ralph Mast had turned the bull loose on me.

Jaskulek sat with arms folded across his chest. He nodded frequently and when I finished he said, "And what's your theory of what happened to Wilson?"

I wasn't so eager to make a pronouncement, but everybody expected me to have one. "If you pointed a pistol at me and demanded one *best* guess, I'd guess he's dead."

I expected Fiddler to come out to the mound and take the ball away from me, but he just squirmed a little.

"You mean murdered, of course," Jaskulek said.

"Not, *of course*, but I've about given up on an accident. He'd have been found by now."

"And a second guess?" the Chief asked.

"I'm almost ashamed to say it. I have no particular evidence, but I grasp it as a possibility he might be hiding—or possibly held against his will. I say it because no one really has any reason to *murder* him as nearly as I can find out. Hardly anybody *liked* him. Just about everybody found him unpleasant—objectionable in some way, but not enough for anybody to kill him."

This was too much for Fiddler.

"And you have no other theories?"

I shook my head.

"Then he's deliberately overlooking the most reasonable one," said Fiddler looking at Jaskulek, and he went to great length to develop the theory that Wilson had somehow sold out to the Russians. "And I'm

sure the first thing you should do, Chief, is get in touch with the F.B.I. We may have to revise the loyalty oath form," Fiddler added in an aside to Talbot.

Jim Marlboro said, "I suggest you let me run pre-employment checks on academic employees."

Jaskulek looked back at me for my reaction to what Fiddler had said.

"I admit," I said, "it's an attractive theory in many ways. There's no doubt that such a move would be a gigantic aid to the Russians. They'd pay a high price. I'd take it as a third choice. But it just isn't likely that other people around here would be acting queerly about that kind of disappearance—unless we have a whole communist cell here."

"Oh my God," cried Fiddler.

"Arlene Graham is acting funny. Why should she call somebody on the phone and say I'm moving in—why should there be a campaign against me every time I go near the Livestock Breeding Center. If Wilson has defected to the Russians no one would know around here and—"

Jaskulek broke in with a grin. "I go along with the murder idea. Any time a professor's missing I just assume it's murder. I've been dreading it for years."

"You're darn sorry it hasn't happened long before this," growled Fiddler.

Jaskulek disregarded his remark.

"And let me tell you, it's the toughest kind of crime to solve."

Jim Marlboro grinned. "Why?"

"Well, when a professor's murdered, you got so many suspects. You heard it—nobody *liked* him. That's par for the course. Tell me, how many students did he have currently?"

"Seventy-five, maybe" grunted Fiddler.

"How many other teachers in his department?"

"Twelve to fifteen," said Jim.

"Already we got close to a hundred prime suspects."

"If you're making a list of people who don't like intellectuals," growled Fiddler, "looks as if you'll have to put your own name at the top of the list."

The Chief looked blank.

Fiddler hammered the desk. "By God, Chief, this June I'm gonna give you an honorary degree. I'm gonna make your an honorary intellectual in front of 30,000 people." Jaskulek took it good-naturedly:

"Don't, for heaven's sake do that. I got enough enemies in town." Then he changed to a more serious tone. "I'd like to poke around the campus a bit with Ober. We'll see what we can do about his number one theory. If there's been a murder, there must be a body."

Fiddler sighed, "I knew you'd want to poke around. Well, I guess it must be. Go wherever you like—" here he looked at me—"but don't attract any more attention than you need to."

Jaskulek and I went down to his black Ford and started out.

We brainstormed as we barnstormed around the campus and around University Center until almost six o'clock. We looked at the settling vats at the University sewage disposal plant. We stopped to chat with the director of the Thermal research lab. We walked through the breeding center and looked at the silos and the feed bins. We entered the Veterinary Research Center and noticed the incinerator where the dead, diseased animals were disposed of. We even drove past the dump where the radioactive materials of the nuclear reactor were deposited. There seemed to be dozens of places where an imaginative person could hide or even eliminate a human body.

"Now," said the Chief as he dropped me off at the parking lot, "it remains for you to find all other places like the ones we've seen and then work on the promising ones, just here on the campus, and I'll work on the ones in town."

"Yeah," I said, "and in my spare time I'll read up on the Red spy system."

Late that night after Madge went to bed I bottled my beer. It seemed a little early according to the recipe, but the bubbles were coming up very slowly from the bottom of the crock and the stuff didn't taste particularly sweet. It came to two and a half cases. I carried the stuff very cautiously to the basement to let it age, and came up rather pleased with

myself. If Fiddler fired me at least I had a supply of beer—for about three cents a bottle.

I cleaned up the mess in the kitchen, went to bed and fell asleep immediately. Sometime thereafter, I don't know how long, the phone rang. I answered it groggily.

"This is Arturo Gatuso," a precise voice said. "There's a note here to call you no matter when I get in."

I fought an urge to groan. "Oh, yes," I mumbled. "I want to-ah-talk to you about George Wilson. We can't find him."

"Oh," said the voice. "Well, I'd be glad to talk. I saw him Friday night."

I felt like a doctor who didn't want to go on a night call. "Maybe I better come over," I said. My tongue kept curling up to go back to sleep. "Ah could-ah-come over."

"Good Lord, no," Gatuso said. "I just got in from Washington and I'm dead tired, and I still have an urgent errand to run across campus. How 'bout tomorrow at 10:30?"

I felt relieved and overwhelmed by sleepiness. "O.K. 10:30 in my office. I'd appreciate—" I was asleep again.

CHAPTER X

Next morning as I froze my way toward Old Main from the parking lot, I could scarcely remember the phone conversation, and I wondered if I might have dreamed it. Again, I was one of the stragglers. We hur-

ried along to class or to office with our heads pulled into our turned-up collars.

There was one guy didn't seem to be in much of a hurry tho. He was sitting behind the wheel of a green Chevy, half leaning against the door post. His hat was pulled down over his eyes. Probably some guy who'd sat up half the night studying, trying now to catch a few winks, and it got the best of him. Well, everybody has his little cross, I reflected. It made me think, however, that I hadn't ever stayed up beyond midnight to study, and that, in turn, led to the realization that if I had, I might not now have a job that suddenly included a Sherlock Holmes role. Thoughts like that can soon spoil a morning, so I hurried into my office, propped my feet up on the desk and let my brains run to my head.

About 9:30 Miss Slocum broke into my little self-pitying reverie. "They just found a dead man." She tried to control herself and report factually, but she was obviously excited.

"A dead man?" I said hopefully. "Good, now they won't have to keep insisting that he ran away to join the Russians. Where did they find the body?"

"In a car, in the parking lot. A student working in the Chem lab—"

Suddenly I remembered the man in the green Chevy. "Now wait, in a car? A green Chevy," I yelled. "Now how did Wilson get there?"

"I don't know what kind of a car

it was. I just heard it from Rita Martin in the President's office. She said Dean McClure called in—a student saw the man in the car from the lab and when he didn't move the whole period, the student went out and looked and he was dead. McClure got the Prex and they called the police. I thought you'd be in on it too."

"I guess they'll call me," I said. "At least now we'll have something to work on." I waited, dangling my feet for somebody to call but nobody did. Then it occurred to me that I was being cut out of things. Fiddler was just by-passing me because my prediction came true. I paced the floor angrily not knowing whether to barge into his office and demand an explanation or to cool off awhile.

By 10:15 I got so itchy I decided I couldn't sit and wait any longer. I figured I could talk with Gatuso later; so I dialed his office.

A man's voice answered. "Romance Languages, Dr. Lange speaking." He sounded out of breath.

"Mr. Gatuso, please," I said.

There was a moment's hesitation, then Dr. Lange said in a curious tone: "I'm afraid Mr. Gatuso can't be reached by telephone. Who's calling, please?"

"John Ober, Department of Security."

"Is this a joke or something, Mr. Ober?" Lange said coolly.

"I don't feel at all like joking," I said. "I have a meeting scheduled with Gatuso for 10:30 and I want to

cancel it. Will you please leave the message."

Dr. Lange was apologetic. "Oh then you haven't heard. You needn't worry that Gatuso will come there for a meeting. He's dead. I just now returned from the University Hospital. I went over to identify the body."

I hung up cursing myself. Arturo Gatuso dead. Why hadn't I thought about the possible threat implied in that note? And why the hell hadn't I looked into that green Chevy?

I suddenly lost confidence in my ability to evaluate reality. Obviously, Fiddler had lost confidence too. I dialed Jim Marlboro's office. He was out. I left a message for him to call me. I walked around the office seething and not knowing what to do next. In a little while Jim called.

"I'm sorry, Jack," he said. "It's a hell of a way to treat a guy. I told Fiddler he ought to call you. But, you see, a student found the body. He went in and told Dean McClure and Mac called Jaskulek. By the time Fiddler got in the act, Jaskulek had the whole thing figured out. The State Police are checking it out."

"What do you mean figured out?" I said.

"Well, it does look cut and dried. Gatuso was stabbed in the heart with an ice pick. Obviously one from Wilson's collection. The Chief seemed to know all about that."

"But anybody can get an ice pick. I could have got one of Wilson's ice picks. Anybody could."

"There were prints all over it. They were Wilson's. It'd be hard for somebody else to use the pick and not smear the prints."

"What else was there?" I said. "Damn, I want to get in this act."

"Oh, there was even a key," Jim said. "You know a fraternity or honor society key, the kind you dangle from a chain. It had the initials G.W.W. It apparently caught in the door when he got out. And they got some other odds and ends, but what else would you need?"

"So that's why Fiddler cut me out," I said, "because the case's cut and dried? They still have to find Wilson."

"I know it's unfair, Jack," Jim said. "But he just seems to have lost confidence in your operation. You see, the campus patrol checked the lot between eight and nine for illegal parking and the patrolman didn't spot the corpse—didn't even see that the car didn't have a sticker for that lot."

"But hell, Jim, he probably saw the guy sitting in there and thought he was a short time visitor. Whose car is it?"

"Apparently Gatuso's. He lives close to campus so he probably wouldn't have a parking sticker."

"Well, what can I do, Jim?" I said. "You've been around here longer than I have."

"I think I'd just keep my head down if I were you, and hope they catch Wilson before too much crap hits the fan. Then show the Prex

you're cutting down on lost-time accidents; jack up the campus patrol a little bit. Make a proposal to build A-bomb shelters for the whole University, call a big conference on Civil Defense. This'll all blow over."

I took Jim's advice. I kept my head down.

CHAPTER XI

The next morning I got the call to see Dr. Fiddler. He was wearing the brown suit neatly pressed. Maybe he'd spilled something on the blue one. On his desk were a half dozen morning papers.

"Well," he said quietly. "The party has come apart in most admired disorder."

"It's a mess," I said miserably. "I've never in my life before heard so much half truth and sensationalized speculation."

"It's one of those things," he said extending his fingers and bumping them together to form a cage. His manner was kind — almost gentle. "This thing has all the elements. People are weary of winter. There's a murder — not just an ordinary one involving the dregs of humanity, but a bloody one involving college professors—there's suspicion of neglect in high places — overtones of scandal." He picked up one newspaper after another and read sections that reflected against him, against me, against the University. He shook his head—"At a time I've asked the legislature for \$35,000,000 to run this

place. Now we'll be lucky to get ten. Lord they might shut the place down. Senator Johnson, that old windbag, is demanding a thorough house-cleaning."

"When the whole truth is known, we'll be off the hook," I said. "That's why I hoped you'd call me yesterday. I'm not satisfied with Jaskulek's explanation of Gatuso's murder. I'd like to know all the details and get back in the act."

Fiddler bumped his fingers together and looked very grave.

"I'm afraid it's impossible," he said evenly. "Your name is mud on this case. Believe me, I'm genuinely sorry for what I must tell you," he paused. I stiffened and grew quiet. "I had calls from four trustees last night — one of them was the governor. I guess you know that the governor is ex-officio a member of the board. They want action. Much as this hurts me, I must make a gesture and there's only one possible to make. I'm going to accept your resignation. Believe me, it's the only possible way — and even then it may not be enough."

"Does it seem like a small thing to you?" I asked.

"I think I can understand your feeling," he said. "I don't want to hurt you any more than I have to. We'll pay you through June, but I must announce the resignation at once. While I haven't approved of everything you've done, I can still give you a recommendation, perhaps have you placed as an administrative

assistant in some other University. I'd like you to continue with the routine duties, but stay out of this other business until June — or at least until we decide whether we should replace you. Perhaps we will have to discontinue the function."

That burned me up. "Dr. Fiddler," I said. "I don't see why you have to apologize for the Department of Security. If you had put your confidence in me and supported me I'd have built it into something you could be proud of. God knows there's plenty to be done. Now suppose I don't do it the way you say?"

He looked at me a moment. "Then I'm afraid I'd have to terminate you immediately. It'd be much better to do it my way."

I thought it over quickly. I didn't want to be seen very long around a place I wasn't wanted. All my associates would be hard put to know how to deal with me — a disgraced, dismissed man living on Fiddler's generosity for four months until I could get another job. But on the other hand I wanted to be around the University. I wanted to be close to people like Arlene Graham, Dr. Poad, Ralph Mast, Chief Jaskulek. How had Miss Graham said it on the phone? *"He's not too bright but he's one of those persistent guys."*

"I'll do it your way," I said.

"Don't be too much discouraged," Fiddler said. "We'll all live this down. You may even come to understand why I have to do what I have to do."

"I understand right now," I said bitterly. The truth is that I really did understand. Under the circumstances he was forced. "I just think that you placed me in an untenable spot. You would never face the truth about Wilson's disappearance. You felt you could avoid the publicity. Now I must pay for it."

"Yes, yes," he said. "Well, we must all live and learn."

CHAPTER XII

I remained as inconspicuous as possible for a few days. I made one statement to a reporter. It said that I was washing my hands of the whole mess; any further investigation would be done by the police. I would limit my activities until June to the routine details. I spoke well of the University and my associates and deplored that "gesture" firing was a fact of life in public work.

My resignation did seem to satisfy the trustees; apparently Fiddler would make it through.

I followed investigation of the crime in the daily paper, but the real news fell off sharply. Certain undisclosed evidence led the police to believe that Wilson was in the Middle West, but the rest was pretty much a repeat of previous vagaries.

By the first week of March I felt ready to talk with Jaskulek. I found the Chief in a wall-staring, foot-dangling frame of mind.

He waved me in without taking

his feet off the desk. "I was just thinking about you," he said. "I'm not real anxious to be seen too much with you, but —"

"I know just how you feel," I said. "I haven't had to refuse too many invitations these last few days. What do you think of what happened to me?"

He shook his head. "Unfair as hell." Then he shrugged, "But —"

"I know," I said. "That's the way the dirty old mop flops."

He grinned sympathetically but was not deeply moved. "What can I say?"

"You can help me. Maybe I can even help you — on the theory that two heads are better than one. I've made up my mind I'm going to solve, or at least *help* solve — the thing. I don't expect to be rehired — don't even think I'd want to be — but, well, hell, it's unpleasant to talk about. You can see what's at stake."

He nodded.

"Whereas," I continued, "your own position may not be so critical," I waited for a reply.

He folded his hands over his belly and looked thoughtful for a moment. "No, certainly not like yours. Of course, it would be nice to figure out what happened — you know, be right about it. But I don't stand much chance of being a hero. The state police may pick Wilson up — and there's no particular pressure on me. If they pick up Wilson soon, I'm in good shape."

"You're sure Wilson did it?"

The Chief pulled his feet off the desk, opened a drawer.

"Couldn't be any other way," he said. He pulled out a soft cloth, untied the corners. There was an ice-pick — imprinted People's Ice and Coal Co. Madison, Wisconsin; on the top was a threaded hole; there were also a fancy gold key with initials G.W.W., and a little ball of wool lint. I looked at it closely. There were several objects like diminutive wheat heads with one side scraped clean.

"And all this was found in Gatuso's car and makes it obvious that George Wilson committed the murder?" I asked incredulously. "No one could have taken one of Wilson's many picks. There are no Gerald W. Whitmores or Glenn W. Winslows — or a million other G.W.W.'s in this world. No one else has little balls of wool lint in his pockets." Jaskulek looked at me tolerantly.

"There are fingerprints, unmistakably Wilson's — no others, a few smudges. If you picked it up with gloves and drove it into my chest, you'd ruin most previous prints even if you didn't leave any of your own, and the little hole at top — probably a bottle opener attachment that came out. They used to be pretty common. As for the initials — how many G.W.W.'s do you think are members of the Future Artificial Breeders of America or whatever the hell organization it is? Even the little ball of wool lint corresponds to that in

the jacket he wore the last Friday he was seen here. We checked the trousers in his closet. Mrs. Carey says he never wore jacket and pants to match."

"What are the little seeds in the lint?" I asked grasping at straws.

Jaskulek chuckled triumphantly again. "You think we'd overlook such a detail — just because it's small. Well we didn't and it's rather interesting. May be the clue that will trap him. Those are seeds. They were checked by a botanist at the State Police laboratories. They're called Sideoat's grama seed's." He settled back, way ahead of me. I didn't speak. "Do you know where Sideoat's grama grows?" he asked. I shook my head. "It's a prairie grass. Wilson picked it up in the West."

"I admit it's pretty overwhelming," I said. "What do you think happened?"

"Probably something like this," Jaskulek said leaning forward. "Wilson had some screwball plan involving the frozen sperm of that prize bull. Gatuso found out about it — probably by accident — Wilson left — probably to establish another whereabouts — sneaked back to murder Gatuso — maybe Wilson had some help here—somebody keeping tabs on Gatuso for him—a fellow like Mast could do that —. He was sort of a faithful assistant."

"Sure stupid of him to do it with an icepick," I said. "One of his own collection—when he's the only guy in the world collecting them prob-

ably. Not very bright to leave a society key with his initials or a wad of wool to identify his suit. There are some things wrong with that, Chief." This bothered the Chief a little:

"Hell, he didn't want to leave the key. That was caught in the door. The wool probably came out of his pocket when he got the pick out." He paused; his eyes troubled, "I must admit tho' it sure *was* stupid to use an icepick."

"I like some things about your theory," I said. "At least it takes Ralph Mast into consideration. But I'd think he'd need a stronger reason than that to spring a Holstein bull on me."

Jaskulek laughed. "I asked him about that. He said you were trying to cover up your own clumsiness, and he said he didn't blame you. It made you look silly." The Chief winked, "From where I sit I can't blame you either."

I figured I'd get nowhere protesting that one. "And you haven't considered Arlene Graham," I said. "I know she's a key figure."

"Yes, you told me," said Jaskulek. "I've talked to her. I didn't get much."

"And why do you cross off some of the others as possibilities?" I said. "You've considered Dr. Poad, for example?"

"He disliked Wilson, that's for sure," said Jaskulek. "But he was home all night the night Gatuso was killed, and my major concern is let's

get the guy that killed Gatuso."

"I suppose it's ditto for people like Morris, Rider, and Milt Musser?"

"Why the hell should a stableman kill a French teacher? No, my theory is that Wilson did it. They lived in the same house. They fought often. Wilson killed Gatuso and we're gonna catch him."

On that note I left the confident Jaskulek with promises that I would not louse up his case if I could helpit.

CHAPTER XIII

Around the first Sunday in March the cold weather broke. I decided to take a drive out to Center Gap and make a drop-in call on Ralph Mast. The drive out was pleasant. The fields were oozing, streams were full. The sky was clear.

I found the house without trouble—a two and a half story newly painted white frame, with green trim. I didn't see any car around and I thought I had missed Ralph. I went around to the back door and knocked. I looked at my watch. It had taken me almost twenty minutes to make the trip. A woman in the sixties wiped her hands on her apron, took a roast pan from the stove to the open, frozen food locker, and came to the door. She looked at me anxiously. "I'm a friend of Ralph's at the University. I thought I'd drop in to see him as I was passing through. But I see he's not around."

"Oh, he's here," she said regard-

ing me closely. "He's in the basement. He has a little shop down there—spends all his time there when he isn't fishing." As she spoke I could hear the whirring of machinery. "Why don't you go on down?" she said. "He'll be glad to see you." She added the last unconvincingly. I stepped inside.

"Just a minute till I get the chicken," she said. She reached into the locker, picked up a fat roaster and dropped it in the pan. "I always like to have a roast chicken for Ralph on Sunday evenings." She fished around for some frozen vegetables. There was a good supply of all kinds of items, mostly home-wrapped and all neatly marked.

"You certainly are well stocked," I said.

"Yes," she said shutting the lid. "We have a nice garden, and Ralph often can get good cuts of meat at the University and you can get some awfully nice chickens at the poultry plant." She took me to the cellar door, opened it and called down to Ralph.

"Ralph, here's a friend of yours," and I went down.

Ralph was surprised but he recovered quickly. He glanced quickly around the room the way a woman might check her house as callers come up the drive. Everything seemed in order. There was a furnace with a coal bin nearby. His workbench was on the other side. There were the typical woodworking tools neatly hung on a pegboard

behind the bench. He seemed to specialize in small gadgets. He was presently shaping something on the lathe. Then he turned to me so warmly that he almost convinced me he was glad to see me.

"Well, this is certainly a surprise," Ralph said holding out his hand. "I thought perhaps you'd left town," he continued. "The last I heard, you had given up all connections with the case."

"Oh, this has nothing to do with the case," I said unctuously enough to be ambiguous. "I just thought you could give me some advice." I smiled as if I were confidently asking a favor of my best friend. "I'm thinking of buying a house out here and I wanted to check the time it takes to drive to University Center—"

"I had the impression you were leaving University Center."

"I may take a job in Extension—and if I do I may have more time for fishing — and — well — upper Lime Creek comes by here. You told me you often fish after work, even in the winter, and I thought you might be willing to show me where the suckers bite. You see, in Extension, I may have to go back nights and I'd like to know before I buy a house how long it takes to get in a little fishing after supper and still go in for a few hours work."

"So you want to check out my alibi for Friday, the 20th?" he said. "Well, why not. You've had enough tough luck. If I can put you at ease on at least that much, maybe you'll

look a little less ridiculous to people around you. I could just as easily order you out of the house, you understand. I know I don't have to talk with you. But anything I can do to get your one-track mind at least off the wrong track—"

I nodded patiently as he sank in the needle.

"Now," continued Mast, "I'm going to take you through it step by step." He stopped and looked pained — "And don't for heaven's sake come to the obvious conclusion that I've memorized my alibi, that an innocent man never knows exact times regarding something he did days or weeks before. The fact is I *did* memorize my alibi, as soon as I discovered that you were trying to pin Dr. Wilson's disappearance on me. I figured I darn well better."

His tone took on the quality of a 4th grade teacher's in explaining the times-tables—to a retarded boy. "I left the University at 5:00 P.M. promptly. I drove home. Milt Musser was in front with me. Willie Dreibelbis, Mel Hoy, and Danny Mothersbaugh were in back. You've probably already checked this with Milt?" I nodded. "Well, we got here—you know what it takes—before 5:30 we made it that night. Milt, Danny and I, that is. We drop Willie off at Emerick's Intersection. I ate supper—pretty fast—10-15 minutes. Then I went over to the Creek to fish; maybe I got there by six, I'm not sure. The sun was down. It was dark soon after. I fished for a good

hour at least and I caught four pretty nice suckers. Now if you know anything about the way fish bite around here, you know you can't catch four suckers in much less than that. I came back then, taking my time; I imagine I got back home around 7:30. I rapped on Milt's window to show him the fish. Then I went in the house, talked with Mother till pretty late, about 10:30, and went to bed —"

"That's right, he did, Mister," Mrs. Mast called from the top of the stairs. "I wouldn't lie for my boy; he was here just like he says —"

"It's all right, Mom," Ralph called. "I think this will convince him." Then he turned to me. "She's been a bit upset since I told her about your suspicions of me. She doesn't *always* eavesdrop."

"I'm sorry I upset your Mother," I said. "Would you mind taking me to the place where you fished?" I added.

"I might as well," he said. "Sure, I'd be glad to." His manner brightened considerably. "Do you want to take a fishing pole along?"

"No," I said. "I know it takes pretty long to get four fish."

We went upstairs, exchanged a few words with his mother, and left in my car. The drive to the creek took less than three minutes. Another minute or two to cross the meadow and we were at the spot just over a limestone bank. I looked over the field, the stream bank. The water washed through rapidly.

There were still patches of ice in the shadows of the sides. I walked over to the base of an oak and looked into a dark, slowly swirling pool. "I guess the suckers lie there in the bottom of the hole," I said.

"You're right," he said. "That's just where I caught them." He was smiling sardonically as I looked into the water. "Why don't you get grappling hooks?" he said. I started back to the car.

"Why bother," I said. "You seem pretty confident that I wouldn't find anything."

"It may be a very clever trick to throw you off the track," he said following me. "I wouldn't want you to pass up a chance to work." I looked around at the browned field.

"Do you fish here often?" I asked. "I mean in all the seasons?"

"Yes," he said. "I come here often. I like to sit under this oak and lean against the trunk. It's especially pleasant late summers and early fall."

We walked on the tufted ridges to keep the mud from sucking our heels.

"Well," he said with exaggerated politeness as we settled into the car. "Is there anything else I can show you? Maybe I can save you another trip. There may be other questions that I can answer before I leave."

"No," I said, "I saw all I wanted to see."

He showed no curiosity about what I had seen. He seemed in all ways a man who had nothing to

hide, nothing to fear being unnecessarily polite to an uninvited visitor.

I encouraged the attitude. "It's easy to see that you couldn't have been back to the University the night of February 20th—and I think I ought to apologize for any anxious moments I've given you." I pulled the car around toward Center Gap.

"Well, that's generous of you," he said pleasantly. "And just to show you there's no hard feelings, I'll buy you a beer—as a sort of going away present."

"It's Sunday," I said, not sure if he was gouging me, "and besides, I'm not sure I'm going away."

"The V.F.W.'s up the road. I'm a member," he continued. "I mean *I'm* the one who's going away." That surprised me.

"Oh, you're leaving the University?"

"Yes, I'm lighting out of here any day now." At his directions I pulled off the road in front of a dull gray house with sharply sloping roof; a sign V.F.W. was the only thing to distinguish it from a vacant house.

We went inside. The bartender greeted Ralph as if they were old buddies and treated me like a welcome guest. We sipped beer silently a minute or two until I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer. "So you're leaving Center Gap and your job. This is a real surprise to me. Where are you going? What will you be doing?"

"Something I've always wanted to do," he said. "I'm going to school.

I'm going to become a scientist in my own right. I'm going to finish my degree. I may get credit for some of the experience I've had, some credit by examination. It's a good deal."

"But," I said. "That will be expensive. How about your mother? How can you suddenly afford it?"

He shifted his position on the stool. "I've been saving a long time. Now I can do it."

We finished the beer. The bartender took the bottles and wiped the bar. "Another round?"

"Not for me," I said. "I must be getting back."

"You a veteran?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"We could use a few more members," he said. "Now that you've been here, stop in again. We'll sign you up."

"I just might do that," I said. "Thanks."

I dropped Ralph off at his house. I glanced at my watch. Then I drove back to the Breeding Center just as fast as I could. I looked at my watch again. It had taken me just fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER XIV

Next morning I checked in at the Veterinary Research Center. I found Dr. Johnson in one of the labs. I introduced myself to him.

"I remember you," he said shaking hands. "You were here with Chief Jaskulek—" He hesitated a sec-

ond as if he meant to say something else—perhaps that he'd heard other news about me. I stuck a question in the awkward gap.

"I'd like to ask a few more questions about the incinerator. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," he said, wiping his hands on a paper towel.

He led the way without saying more and I followed down a corridor between two rows of stalls. From each side, sick animals looked at me helplessly. There were hot, dry noses, fever-bright eyes, and heaving flanks—but no moans or whimpers. We stopped in a big room with a concrete floor, several steel tables, a big sliding door, a variety of knives hung on the wall.

"We do autopsies here," Dr. Johnson said. "I guess I told you that no animal ever leaves this place alive."

I felt a twinge of pity or sadness. "But certainly some of them recover from their illnesses," I said.

Dr. Johnson smiled. "If they do we make them sick with another disease. This isn't a hospital; we can't afford to discharge the patients to carry organisms to animals outside.—No, one way or another, they're all doomed—all hope abandon, ye who enter here.—We examine their organs and then in here they go." He turned to a round plug—about the size of a man-hole cover—in the floor. He tugged at the handles to swing the thickly insulated lid away from the opening. A white light like that of the center of the sun shimmered. I could

feel my skin contract as the heat dried my cheek.

"I guess you keep this running all the time," I said.

"Just about," replied Johnson. "We have to get rid of a lot of meat. Of course, there are some days it isn't running."

"How long does it take to cremate something?" I asked. "Completely, that is."

"This one will do about 125 lbs. an hour," Johnson said.

"Is there smoke?" I asked.

"No smoke. Air circulates under the carcass. No smoke."

"How 'bout ashes?"

He tilted his head. "A fine white ash."

"How often do you remove the ashes?"

"About once a week."

"What do you do with them?"

"We put them in GI cans, take them to the University dump." He looked at me in amused tolerance. "When we're gone it's locked and somebody's here most of the time. Do you think we're not aware that this incinerator could give people ideas?"

"How 'about Friday evening February 20th? Was somebody here all the time that night?"

Johnson shrugged. "I guess it was like any other night. We probably locked up at five or five-thirty. One of us is usually back by seven. Then we have a graduate assistant and a service employee come in about ten. They stay overnight."

I had to agree with Dr. Johnson that didn't leave much time for anybody to get in and use the incinerator. I went back to my office.

Just before lunch Jim Marlboro called me. He seemed to be in a cheerful mood. Compared to me *everybody* was in a cheerful mood.

"You opened that witch's brew yet?"

"No," I said. "I'm letting it age another month. The book said it gets better. Don't worry, I'll call you when it's ready."

"How would you like an interesting piece of news?" he said.

"I'd like an interesting piece of news," I said. "In my condition I can't be fussy."

"Would you like to take a guess who Gatuso's beneficiary is?"

"It couldn't be," I said. "You think just because I'm disgraced you can make me believe anything."

"Just as big as life," Jim said. "Arlene Graham."

"Well, I'll be damned," I said. Jim chuckled jucily.

"That's something, huh?" he said. "What do you think?" "The company won't pay her, for Christ sakes—will it?"

"If they do, it won't be a record for speed," Jim said. "Course, if she's legitimate beneficiary, and if she's not mixed up in Gatuso's death—I guess she'd get it in time. She expects it. Tho' she seemed surprised when she heard."

"I think we ought to drop in on her," I said. "You know—look out

for the insurance company's interests."

"That's just what I had in mind," Jim said.

Jim stopped at 7:30. We headed for Garden Drive.

We found Miss Graham flushed and expectant. She had gone to a bit of trouble to look attractive and it worked fine. Her hair had that carefully uncombed look. Her leanness was emphasized by a tight brown skirt and a light green rib-stitched sweater that the ads call "cloud soft." The look of pleasant anticipation faded when she saw me.

Jim carried the ball:

"Miss Graham. You weren't, I believe, related to Mr. Gatuso." Arlene put one hand on top of the other in her lap.

"No," she said quietly. "We weren't related. And it would be ridiculous of me to pretend to be broken up. I scarcely knew him. So—" she smiled sweetly, her mouth turning down in a provocative way. "I had no idea he had done this, but I'm aware of the value of our employee benefits—I'm aware that the insurance company lets your office settle the claims. It's all right with me if you just give me the check—perhaps I can give you a cup of coffee." Jim accepted. I refused. She went into the little kitchen, came right back with two cups and cream and sugar on a tray.

Jim stirred sugar into the black liquid.

"When professor Snarf has his

coronary on the library steps, we dash right over and pay the widow—right away. But when an employee is found with an ice-pick in his gizzard, the insurance company likes us to talk it over a little bit.”

Arlene’s eyes narrowed. “Our manual says it—‘This policy pays for death from any cause—even suicide.’”

“You’ve been doing your homework,” Jim said, “but suicide ain’t murder. It’s just that we don’t like to tempt beneficiaries beyond their strength. Fifteen thousand dollars—that’s four years pay for a class five secretary.”

“That enough, Mr. Marlboro.” Her eyes were very cold.

“But I must ask some questions, Miss Graham,” Jim said. “First, why did Mr. Gatuso name you his beneficiary? Why should he do that?”

Her lips tightened, the corners coming up. “I’m sure I don’t know what motivates men.”

Jim laughed. “I’ll bet you don’t. Now why did Arturo Gatuso change his beneficiary from a school to you?”

She lowered her eyes. “I think it was because he—loved me.”

“Did you love him?”

“No.”

“Did you date him?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Last summer quite a lot—not so much lately.”

“And you didn’t know he had changed his beneficiary?”

She hesitated.

“Well?” Jim demanded.

“No.”

“How ’bout George Wilson? Did he give you gifts to equal Gatuso’s?”

She hesitated again. “Both of them loved me—at least they said they did.”

“And they had nice ways of showing you?” said Jim looking around the apartment. “You dress well.” He looked around. “I doubt that you could live like this on your salary.”

“They never bought me any of this,” she said indignantly. “I paid for all of this.” Immediately she seemed sorry to have said that. “Of course, they were good to me—” she added quickly.

Jim took advantage. “How could you buy these expensive furnishings? I know something about your background, so don’t kid me.”

She squirmed uncomfortably. “I got a sum of money.”

“Details.”

“When I lived in the rooming house on Lime Street,” she said slowly—“Well, I did some things for the landlady. She was alone. She left me some money.”

Jim smiled and nodded. “You might say you’re a professional beneficiary. How many other times have there been?” She didn’t answer, but her eyes hardened in resentment. Jim continued: “It’s a pretty good profession. I suppose there must be any number of familyless old maids, widows, eccentric bachelors,” Jim looked at me. “If a girl gave half her attention to a career like that she

could develop a pretty good side line."

Arlene tossed her head and sniffed—"I think you're being rather insulting. Can I help it if people like me well enough to—well, see that I inherit something?"

"That's what we're interested in," Jim said. "To see if you can help it."

"If people prefer to leave their money to a friend instead of an institution, why should it concern you? I thought the wishes of the dead were to be respected."

"It's just that you choose them so well. Gatuso was a young man. He named you his beneficiary," Jim snapped his fingers. "Bingo, he's dead."

"And you're refusing to settle with me," Arlene said. "You know I had nothing to do with Gatuso's death."

I broke in. "Then you wouldn't object to telling me what you were doing on the evenings of February 20th and February 25th?" I said. She looked daggers at me. "The 20th was a Friday—the last Wilson was seen. The 25th was Wednesday. The night Gatuso got the ice pick in the ribs," I added. She was ready with the answer.

"I entertained at bridge both nights, two tables."

"Not all night," I said. "Gatuso was killed in the wee hours."

"Gee-Gee stayed with me all night," Miss Graham said.

"Gee-Gee?"

"Gloria George. She works in Purchasing."

"So you really got your alibi sewed up tight. You didn't leave the apartment and seven other girls can prove it."

"That's right, Mr. Ober. That's right," she said tossing her head.

"You certainly went to some trouble to make sure you had those nights covered. Don't the other girls take turns?"

The corners of her mouth came down. She looked at me with contempt.

"You certainly had the alibi on the tip of your tongue," I continued, "as if you've been thinking about it—most people can't remember so readily."

"I have a good memory. I remember what I do *every* night."

"So does your friend, Ralph Mast. He's handy with alibis too."

She blinked. "I have no friend named Ralph Mast."

"Don't kid me," I said. "I bet you're beneficiary on his insurance policy."

"I don't know anybody by that name," she said again.

"Then whom did you call the night I visited you—the 23rd?"

"I don't recall."

"Just as I thought. Your memory is just good when it needs to be. Well, you called somebody at a number that ended with 789—or close to it and right after that I had a lot of bad luck."

"You're paranoid. No wonder Dr. Fiddler fired you. Now go—"

"One more thing, Miss Graham,"

I said. "The police think they know who killed Arturo Gatuso." I didn't wait for a reply. "They think George Wilson did it."

She laughed. "That's impossible."

"They found one of his keys in Gatuso's car. It was Wilson's ice pick."

Her jaw unhinged and her breath caught. Then she recovered quickly and flicked her head.

"So Wilson killed him. When they catch him you can give me my check."

I looked at her a few seconds, then nodded to Jim and we left.

CHAPTER XV

Jim dropped me off at home and I went straight to the phone.

"Miss George," I said in as authoritative a voice as I could muster, "this is Sergeant Templeton of the University Center Police." (I made up the name, stressed the *Sergeant* and slurred the *Templeton*.) "I'm investigating a burglary that occurred on February 25th in the Garden Apartments. I understand you were a guest of Miss Arlene Graham that night."

"Why — February 25th — yes, sergeant. I stayed there all night, but—" Her voice sounded as if she were frightened.

"Let me say that you're not a suspect Miss George."

"Oh, that's good," she said. "I get so nervous talking to a policeman."

"I wondered if you were awak-

ened any time during the night. Was there any commotion, any noise. Did you get up during the night?"

"No, there was no commotion. I didn't get up."

"Did Miss Graham?"

"Only to answer the phone."

I tried not to let my voice betray my eagerness. "There was a phone call you say? About what time?"

"Oh, about two o'clock. I remember I looked at the alarm when Arlene got up."

"Did you hear any of the conversation?"

Gee-Gee hesitated, "Well, I don't think —"

"It may have some bearing," I said. "Perhaps the call was intended to make Miss Graham turn on the light and that would be a signal." It was pretty weak, but Gee-Gee bought it.

"Oh, I remember. I heard Arlene say 'I'll be out in the parking lot, darling—give me about twenty minutes.'"

"Then what happened?"

"Arlene hung up and dialed again."

"Did you hear what she said this time?"

"Not very distinctly, but it sounded like, 'He'll be in the parking lot if you come soon! I thought I heard her say something about a green Chevy.'"

"Didn't you think this was odd?" I asked.

"Yes, I did. But Arlene came back

laughing. She said the first call was from a guy who has been bothering her—calling at all hours for a date. She said she had complained to you—the police—and that the second call was to the police. She said she hoped they would put an end to his bothering her.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” I said. “I remember the incident. Well, thank you Miss George. Oh, one more thing—you didn’t hear the number she dialed—you know—count the clicks by any chance?”

“Oh, no I didn’t. Heavens it was two o’clock.”

I thanked her again and hung up.

CHAPTER XVI

Next evening I went out to help Jim clean out the swimming pool. We had a lot of fun; he kidded me about holding out so long on my home brew. I told him that it was getting better every day and that as soon as we found Wilson, we’d have a party. We worked and kidded until well after dark. Then I headed for University Center. We had talked about beer so much that I began to feel thirsty as I drove. Then I remembered the V.F.W. where Ralph and I had stopped. When I came to it, I pulled up on the limestone apron, got out and walked in the door.

“I thought I’d take you up on your invitation,” I said to the bartender. He looked at me a moment trying to hide the fact that he didn’t recog-

nize me. I let him off the hook immediately. “I came in here in March with Ralph Mast — on a Sunday. You told me to stop in again.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” he said. He pushed a plate of faded pretzels my way. “Well, sit down. What can I do for you?” Apparently one customer meant full-blast business to him. He plugged in the nicklelodeon, invested a company dime, picked up a bar cloth, and began to massage the bar.

“A bottle of beer,” I said. “Do you have any I never heard of?”

He looked at me oddly.

“I like to try new brands. I want to see if I can find some that ain’t good.”

“Well, I got Bear Meadow Lager,” he said. “Hardly anybody likes that.”

I nodded enthusiastically. He set a bottle up. I tasted it carefully. “It’s good,” I said, and I meant it. “There just isn’t anything like bad beer.” I watched the bubbles and listened to the last two cents worth of music. When it stopped I said, “Seen much of old Ralph lately?”

“Nope, he’s leavin’, you know.” He sniffed. “I would too if I had something to do.” We talked about the pros and cons of my becoming a member of the V.F.W. and I had another Beer Meadow Lager. I reached into my pocket for my pipe and my Union Leader. They weren’t there.

“Damit,” I said. “I left my pipe at Jim’s place.”

“Try a cigar, only eight cents.”

"Well, in a pinch," I said taking a panetella. "But I'll never get mellow enough to join the vets on a cigar." I stood up and looked around. "Is there a phone here?" He pointed to a pay station on the wall. I went over and dialed Jim's number. His wife answered and before I could tell her the message she said 'Just a minute,' put the phone down and called Jim. I stood there chewing my unlit cigar, drumming my fingers and reading the instructions.

Then I noticed the number — Diamond 8-6789. When Jim got to the phone, I was feeling pretty good. "Jim," I said. "On the concrete ledge just outside your cabana—my pipe and tobacco. Will you bring them along to the office tomorrow."

"Yeah, sure," he said. "You home already?"

"No," I said. "I'm calling from Diamond 8-6789—7-8-9, that is." He didn't catch on. The last three digits hadn't kept him awake as much as they had me. "Let me make it clearer. This is the V.F.W. on the road to University Center from Center Gap. Ralph Mast used to hang around here. If the bartender has a memory I'm gonna get details in a minute."

"Oh, I read you, Buddy. Well, let me know what you learn."

I hung up and went back to the bar.

"Tell me, was Ralph here February 23rd—say 9 to 11—and was he here on February the 25th?"

"Lord, I don't know. All I know

he came in here every nite. That is every nite he didn't go fishing."

On an inspiration I pulled out a card calendar from my wallet. "Look at February. Here's Friday the 20th. He wasn't here that night, he went fishing that night."

The bartender rapped his knuckles against his forehead. "February 20th—Friday—sure that was the weekend night of our George Washington Party—" He shook his head. "Boy that was a blast. Christ, they even cut down the wild cherry tree in back of the house."

"O.K. now the Monday nite, after that. Was he here?"

The bartender's eyes lit up. "Sure I remember. Yes, he was here. We talked about the party he missed. He was sitting on that stool."

"Did he get any phone calls here that night?"

"By golly he did," the bartender said, "about 10:00 — 11:00 o'clock. He didn't say much on the phone, just listened. And he seemed kinda unhappy when it was over. I remember I said 'bad news?' and he just grunted."

"Did he often get phone calls here?"

"No, not often — just a couple times."

"Do you remember any other times?"

Again the bartender reflected. "Yeah, just a couple days later, he stayed here till after I shut the place up. He said he was waiting for a phone call that time. He just hung

around and waited. I can sure remember that one."

"And did the call come?"

"Yeah, finally—I'd just about lost my patience but he kept asking me to wait another fifteen minutes. You know how it goes."

"And what time did the call come through?"

"Right around two o'clock. I made up my mind I'd never wait that long again on anybody."

"Bartender," I said happily, "don't let anybody tell you your memory isn't as good as it ought to be. Give me one of your application blanks!" We shook hands and I went out into the April night. What with the bartender's memory and the Bear Meadow Lager, things were looking much better.

When I got back home there was a note to call Jaskulek.

The chief's voice was excited. "Ober, can you come down here tomorrow?"

"Late in the morning I can," I said. "I have two errands. Did you find Wilson?"

"No," Chief said. "I wanta talk about Ralph Mast."

"You never wanted to hear about him before," I said.

"Well, he wasn't dead before," Jaskulek said.

Somehow I wasn't surprised.

"Dead? Where?"

"A room in the Blue Boy Motel—about eight mile out route 310. 32 bullet right in the head."

"Any idea who?"

"None. That's why I wanta talk to you. The maid found him. Apparently happened in the early morning—2-3 o'clock. There was a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door all day. Maid finally opened it."

"Chief," I said, "I think I'll be a big help to you. Have you notified his mother yet?"

"No, we're sweating that out now."

"Can you wait—till tomorrow—late morning?"

"I think that would be best," Chief said. "I'll work it out with the State Police."

"One other thing, Chief," I said. "How well do you know Bill Martin at the bank?"

"Real good," Jaskulek said.

"See if he'll tell you whether Arlene Graham checked out a sizeable sum of money during the past month or so."

"Why?" Chief said.

"I'll tell you tomorrow," I said.

CHAPTER XVII

Early the next morning I made an appointment to see Professor George Garretson of the Botany Department. I entered the Botany Building on the ground floor and walked up the worn stairway to the third floor where Professor Garretson had his office. At the end of the corridor I could look out over greenhouses, across the valley to Center Summit. There was a bulletin board filled with job opportunities for

Botany graduates. Somebody had jammed an eraser behind the handle of the water fountain to keep the water flowing fresh. The floors had recently been painted a government gray. My footsteps reverberated through the halls.

I expected Dr. Garretson to be a myopic, necktie-awry little old man smelling vaguely of algae. But I found him to be athletically built, neatly dressed in a blue suit, and not over thirty-five years old. He had blue eyes that he could warm up at will. He shook hands with me and his eyes sparkled. "It's not quite clear from your phone call what you want," he said. "Why not have a seat and explain it to me again." I sat down in a slippery seated office chair and looked around. The whole east wall was given over to a huge map of the county. On a table along the opposite wall were stacks of newspapers containing samples of plants ready to go into the drier. A case of reference books occupied most of the space along the south wall.

"Well, I'm not sure I know how to begin, Dr. Garretson," I said. "But it seems to me once when I was in the Ag. library, I read a bulletin you wrote about flora in this county. I believe that you've been making an exhaustive study of the county."

Dr. Garretson nodded. "I wrote the pamphlet. It was circulated by Extension. And I *am* working on a complete study."

"And are you nearly finished?"

He laughed and his eyes took on the warm glow again. "I'm afraid one is never finished. Plants come and go — but you could say I'm pretty well up to date on all but," he pointed to the map. "The area here at the lower end."

"Good," I said. "Now I seem to remember that you said in this article that you found flowers, weeds, plants—whatever you call them—that one wouldn't expect to find here."

"Oh, yes. That's certainly true. It may be true many places. Around here there are some cool ravines where temperature and moisture conditions are such that you might find plants you'd not normally expect to see this far south. There are a few small areas where I've found plants that you just wouldn't associate at all with this state. Some that are normally seen in other parts of the country. Yes, that's right."

"That's what I was driving at—and a botanist, say in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia or Harrisburg not closely acquainted with this specific area — if you showed him such a plant and asked where it grows would probably say the other part of the country where it is most common."

Dr. Garretson nodded. "Yes, I think that's right. He'd say where it is commonly found. He'd hardly be able to name *all* the places it *may* be found."

"Specifically," I said hopefully, "is Sideoats grama such a plant?"

He recognized the name immediately. "Yes, *Bouteloua Curtipendula* is one. Scribner's Panicum, and Tall-Dropseed are others. I remember the Sideoats grama very well. I was quite delighted when I discovered them. They exist in very tiny patches—but they're there. Only two tiny stations in the county."

I got up and walked over toward the map. "I'll bet I can tell you one of the areas where the Sideoats grama is found. Would that surprise you?"

He tilted his head and looked at me curiously. "That would indeed surprise me."

I pointed — "Up here, in the upper reaches of Lime Creek not far from Center Gap."

"By George, you're right," he said. "That is the area—quite a thick concentration. There's a limestone ledge there between the creek and the road."

"One more question if you don't mind." He shook his head. "If a fellow walked through there at the right time, sat down or fished there and so on, could he get the seeds in his clothing, cuffs, pockets, equipment?"

"Oh, he certainly could. In general, that is. There'd be plenty of seeds. They have a way of getting into things." He turned his pockets inside out, "My clothing is full of seeds. My wife complains about that."

I continued. "Could this happen in the middle of February? If I went

fishing there in February could I get the seeds in my pocket?"

He shook his head immediately. "Sideoats grama seeds fall off in the fall, so they couldn't possibly go directly from the grass to the pocket, of course, they could get in your clothes from rocks. Seeds are very good hitch-hikers."

I pondered a few moments. "Well, it doesn't matter when he got them," I said half to myself—then aloud to Dr. Garretson: "But you would say that if a man had Sideoats grama seeds in his pocket and you knew he hadn't been west—then he'd have been hanging around the Lime Creek near Center Gap."

"I certainly would," Dr. Garretson said. "That's certainly the first thing I would think."

I shook hands warmly and left.

I went directly to the parking lot and began driving toward Center Gap. Ralph Mast's mother was in the back yard raking the winter's debris from the grass. She nodded politely and smiled faintly when she recognized me. I could hardly look at her, knowing the news she would soon get. I talked fast to hide my feelings.

"Dr. Poad asked me to pick up several items that would be useful in at the lab," I lied. "They're just little things that Ralph was keeping here and he may have forgotten to return them."

She looked worried.

"They may not even be here. If they're not, there's no problem. Per-

haps if we go in the house I can find them. I think one item would be in Ralph's workshop."

We went in the house. She opened the cellar door. "Well, just go down and look," she said. "If you don't mind, I won't come down. I can't stand to go the steps."

I went down to the workshop. The work table was cleared. Some cigar boxes with nails and assorted nuts and bolts were stacked neatly. I looked into them quickly. Then I tried the drawers. In the second one I found what I was looking for—it was a piece of broom handle about six inches long. In the sawed end a threaded bolt was imbedded. In the threads of the bolt that protruded were tiny grains of sawdust. I wrapped it in my handkerchief, dropped it into my jacket pocket, and went upstairs to the kitchen. "Did you find what you were looking for?" Mrs. Mast said.

"No," I said. "We'll have to check the lab again. It may be there." It seemed to me better to lie than to explain what I had found. She turned up her palms in a gesture of helplessness. "It doesn't matter," I said. "The other item is more important." I pointed to the frozen locker. "I think Ralph was keeping some frozen material that's very important in the work of the breeding center. Do you remember if Ralph ever brought something home to keep in the locker?"

"Yes, he did," she said. "In the winter. I guess it might have been

January or February. He brought a package home and he put it in the locker and told me to be careful not to let it thaw. We had to keep the locker turned as low as we could. It was a problem. He worried a lot about it. He even kept it in a can of liquid that was supposed to keep it very cold. He worried about it a lot."

"That's it," I said. "I think if I pack it carefully I can get it back in time." Mrs. Mast shook her head apologetically.

"But it isn't here. Ralph repacked it in that liquid." She frowned thoughtfully. "Nitro — something or other. I think he said —"

"Nitrogen," I said. "Liquid nitrogen."

"Yes, that's it I think," she seemed relieved.

"And did he take it with him?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, he took it with him."

I left then and hurried back to Chief Jaskulek.

Jaskulek was fuming.

"Where the hell have you been?" he said. "Whoever did this might be in Jericho by now."

"The State Police are on this, I thought you said there's no heat on you."

"If you know something spill it," he said.

"Did you check with Bill Martin?" I asked.

"Yep, Arlene Graham checked out \$2500 in cash on January 3rd, and on February 26th \$5000."

"You know what day that was?" I asked.

Jaskulek shook his head.

"The day we found Gatuso."

"What's the connection?"

"I think we better pick up the Graham girl and find out," I said. "But first, take a look at this." I tossed him the piece of broom handle I got from Mast's shop. "What do you think that is?" I asked.

The Chief turned it over. "Damned if I know."

"Get the ice pick that killed Gatuso," I said. He got it from the drawer.

"Now see if you can fit these two together."

He did in about three seconds.

"A handle extension," he said. "That hole wasn't there for a bottle cap remover, after all."

"It might have been originally," I said. "Mast killed Gatuso with this, and he didn't have to disturb any prints to do it. He's the guy that stole the bull sperm. And I think got rid of Wilson."

"Why?" Jaskulek said.

"Arlene Graham," I said. "Let's go."

We took the police car.

"What was Mast doing in a motel on route 310?" I said.

"Nobody knows," Jaskulek said.

"Stopped off to see somebody. Had his car packed for a long trip."

"Whose room?"

"Some woman from Lower Merion. A Natalie Granger. State Police are hunting her."

"Does the motel manager remember her?"

"His wife checked her in. Doesn't remember her—not well enough to describe her anyway."

"Stop behind Old Main," I said. "I want to pick up something from Jim Marlboro."

"Christ, let's get to the girl," Jaskulek said.

But he did what I said, swung the car around the circle, parked in a reserved slot and waited. I was back in two minutes. I held out to him—a photograph of Arlene Graham—from her personnel folder.

"What the hell!" Chief said. "We know what she looks like."

"We'll be glad for it," I said. "Let's go."

Minutes later we were pounding on her door. She opened it abruptly. She wore a two-piece textured cotton suit with severe lines. A white headband held her hair higher than usual. She didn't smile or look alarmed. But her eyes were heavily made up and they looked tired.

"Yes?" she said coldly.

I stepped through the door. She backed into the room. A 26 inch pullman, a train case and a lady's overnight bag in matching cream stood before the sofa.

"We've come to pick you up for killing Ralph Mast," I said.

She didn't change her expression. "It's the third time you've come here mouthing gibberish," she said.

"You checked into the Blue Boy Motel night before last. You had

Ralph Mast meet you there. You shot him."

"It's a lie," she said. "I don't know Ralph Mast. I haven't left the apartment."

I took her photograph from my pocket. I gave it to her. "The manager's wife identified you. You registered under the name of Natalie Granger, from Lower Merion. She'll testify to that."

That did it. She turned pale and began to shake. She sat on the edge of the sofa and held her hand over her face for several seconds. Then she straightened, sighed, and lowered her hands to her lap.

"All right. I did it, but it was self-defense."

"I don't believe it," I said.

"What other reason could there be?" She waited to see how much I knew.

I tried to line up my hunches. "I think there was a fallingout between murderers. When you and Mast killed Wilson..."

She came off the sofa screaming. "That's a lie. I had nothing to do with killing Wilson."

"Then how do you know he's dead." I yelled at her.

She subsided, knowing I had trapped her. She sat.

"I knew—the night you and Mr. Marlboro came to my apartment to talk about Gatuso. When you said that one of George's keys was found in Gatuso's car. Then I knew that Mast had killed George."

"And you were shocked." I said.

"Yes," and horrified." She leaned forward, her quick little mind working. "Ralph told me he had kidnapped Wilson and was holding him in a hunting cabin—until Ralph could sell the secret. There was absolutely no thought in my mind of bloodshed."

Chief Jaskulek sighed.

"And Gatuso." I said sadly. "Why Gatuso?"

"Well," she said, her eyes almost tearful, "poor Mr. Gatuso saw Ralph with George that Friday evening after Ralph had arranged his fishing alibi. It was essential to Ralph that Gatuso be put out of the way until after the whole thing was over. I thought Ralph had hidden him away with Wilson. But..."

She put her face in her hands and actually got out a sob or two.

"Now Arlene," I said. "You don't really mean to tell us that you believed Ralph Mast would release a professor he'd kidnapped, and who's discovery he'd sold, to point an accusing finger."

"Oh, yes. I was so stupid."

I laughed scornfully, everything now neatly arranged in my persistent little mind.

"Not you, Arlene. You masterminded the whole plot."

She jerked erect, her eyes iced with hatred.

"You're an opportunist Arlene. A professional beneficiary of old maiden ladies, widows and lonely old men. You had a good but not overly lucrative thing going with

Wilson and Gatuso. They both loved you, being susceptible to probably any moderately attractive young woman who was attentive."

The "moderately" got her and she lifted her nose disdainfully.

"They were the source of this plush apartment and the comfortable bank account. And you were the reason they hated each other. Each trying to out-do the other for your favor.

"You learned about Wilson's twinning discovery and realized how much it was worth. You were probably pretty disgusted with Wilson, a dedicated scientist not concerned with commercializing his discovery.

"Then you met Ralph Mast. Young, handsome, virile. I'll even give you the benefit of the doubt and say you fell in love with him. And, wonder of wonders, he was George Wilson's assistant. He hated Wilson with a jealous passion. But, better yet, he was smart and knew Wilson's twinning secret — having worked so closely with him.

"It makes a romantic picture. Maybe holding hands across a table in a tavern, possibly in Lower Merion. You're looking fondly up at Ralph, a star in one eye and a dollar sign in the other. And you suggest . . ."

Chief Jaskulek muttered, "You're being too dramatic."

"You suggest that if George Wilson were to disappear along with the prize bull sperm before he had re-

vealed the secret of his twinning discovery, the opportunity available to one brilliant young technician would be limitless. Ralph would enroll at a distant university, expenses and tuition paid from Arlene's savings, and as a thesis for his doctorate discover a process that would guarantee twinning in cattle. Arlene and Ralph Mast would burst into the heady, rarified atmosphere of the university elite, of the professors and their ladies, in a blaze of glory. You did bank on marrying Ralph, didn't you, Arlene?"

Arlene sat stiffly erect, her hands clenched like twisted talons in her lap. Her face was a mask of frustration and hatred. All I'd said had hit the nail on the head. I was really warming up.

"Mast caught those four fish on Thursday night and kept them alive to make it appear that he'd been fishing Friday night instead.

"Meanwhile, Arlene made her choice between Gatuso and Wilson. Gatuso won the fair lady. Arlene wanted to disassociate herself as much as possible from the soon to disappear professor of animal physiology. It added a nice extra touch. Professor Wilson, the rejected suitor, was even nastier than usual toward his associates. Nobody really gave much of a damn that he wasn't around over the week-end.

"So, when Friday evening rolled around, Ralph Mast drove home as usual, dropping his passengers along the way, ate a quick supper and told

his mother he was going fishing. Instead, he drove like a bat out of hell back to the Center where Wilson was still working by himself. On some pretext he got Wilson to follow him to the Disease Research Center. It was probably on their way to the big incinerator that Gatuso saw Mast and Wilson together. It didn't mean anything to Gatuso at the time, but to Ralph it meant an alibi shot to hell . . ."

Chief Jaskulek interrupted. "Now what was this Arturo Gatuso, a language teacher, doing hanging around a barn full of sick animals?"

"Well," I said in my most condescending manner. "It doesn't really seem important, but I'd guess that he went out there to gloat just a little over his triumph with Arlene. According to their landlady, Wilson badgered Professor Gatuso pretty unmercifully. Gatuso was in high spirits and probably had an exultantly nasty desire to needle Wilson. Gatuso had probably made Arlene his beneficiary that same day.

"Anyway, after Mast killed Wilson and dumped him into the crematorium, he drove home, picked up the fresh fish he'd caught the night before and alibied himself with Milt Musser by claiming they had been caught that evening. The murder and disposal of Wilson had taken no more than an hour.

"Saturday Ralph planted Wilson's bicycle at Center Summit to further confuse the issue and sometime during the week-end he stole the prize

bull sperm from the freezer at the Breeding Center.

"Now there was only one loose end—Arturo Gatuso. He'd gone to Washington to attend some meetings. Arlene wrote her little note urging Gatuso to call her the moment he returned. Mast had Wilson's keys, so he's most likely the one who got the ice pick from Wilson's foot locker. He fashioned the handle extension. Then there was nothing to do but wait for Gatuso's return.

"When Wilson was missed, Mast suggested in an off-hand way that Wilson just might have defected—sold his discovery to the highest bidder, possibly a foreign country. When the bull sperm was discovered missing—that clinched it.

"On the night Gatuso was to return, Mast kept the bartender up at the V.F.W. out on Center Gap Road. When Gatuso found the urgent note from Arlene he called her immediately and, on the wings of love, flew to a rendezvous with her in the parking lot. But instead of Arlene, he met Ralph Mast and an ice-pick."

I turned to Chief Jaskulek. "Oh, Chief," I said. "You'd better have someone get that bull sperm from Ralph Mast's car and return it to the Breeding Center."

"Yeah," Chief Jaskulek said. "But go on. You're doing pretty well for a disgraced Security Officer. Why did Miss Graham kill Mast?"

"Yes, Mr. Bright," Arlene hissed. "Why?"

"Well," I said rather importantly. "Arlene had always lived off people who loved her—people less attractive than herself. Innocent people like Professor Wilson and Gatuso. But she fell in love with Ralph Mast. She was smitten and it made her near-sighted. Like a near-sighted spider, she mistook a bigger spider for a fly."

"I think it really shook Arlene up when she realized she was Professor Gatuso's beneficiary. She hadn't expected that, and it put her in an embarrassing position. Within a week after she has been made beneficiary the insured is murdered—and—apparently by a man she is known to have been intimate with. These are the kind of circumstances an insurance investigator just loves."

"At the same time, Ralph is altogether in the clear. I'm the only one that even suspected Ralph knew Arlene. And I'm disgraced, fired and looking for a new job. There is absolutely no connection between Ralph and Gatuso. I doubt that Mast had ever seen Gatuso before the night he murdered him."

"Mast is on cloud nine. His future—a glorious PHD, international fame, and a fortune to boot. It's pretty certain he wasn't about to jeopardize all this by getting involved with a pretty ordinary class five secretary who'd gotten herself mixed up in murder."

"He probably didn't put it that bluntly to Arlene. She had given him her savings, and he was cooling. All she had in return was a vague promise of money from the sale of Wilson's twinning discovery and the subsequent sale of the bull sperm. And this in the nebulous future. It must have become pretty obvious to Arlene."

"So, she took the room at the Blue Boy Motel under an assumed name—and she took along a pistol. When Ralph showed up, his car packed and ready to go—without her—she knew for certain."

"She shot him."

Arlene's mouth was a thin red line. It split. "You God damned prying, persistent son of a bitch."

I felt ten feet tall.



MANHUNT'S

Gun Rack



Llama .45 Auto

The LLAMA .45 CALIBER AUTOMATIC PISTOL is the big brother in the Llama line of auto pistols. Made by the world-famous Gabilondo Company of Spain, the original Llama automatic pistol was designed in 1931 for .38 caliber ammunition. It is now made in .22, .32, .380 and .45 calibers. Its excellent balance, smooth handling action and rugged construction have made it one of the outstanding automatic pistols in the world. In recent years it has become the standard side-arm of many governments municipal and military authorities.

LUIS MIGUEL PEREZ was walking slowly along the Promenade des Anglais on an afternoon in October, with his hands clasped behind him and his head down, thinking as usual, sadly and single-mindedly, about girls. On his right, beyond the boardwalk railing and a brief stretch of sand, lay the gray, choppy Mediterranean; ahead, the deserted beach curved out in the direction of Villefranche and Monte Carlo; on his left, watersoaked and indifferent as the palm trees lining the boulevard, was Nice. It had been raining for a week. Sometimes the weather was warm; sometimes, like today, it was cool with a strong breeze, but the rain went on and on. It let up

for short periods in the afternoon and evening, long enough to encourage a few strollers to try the Promenade, and to stimulate waiters to begin taking down chairs at sidewalk cafés. Then it started again.

Perez was sixty-eight years old squat and bowlegged. He had on the huge dark glasses which he always wore in public, indoors or out, a double-breasted blue jacket with light green trousers, and a checkered yellow cap. A brightly colored ascot was tucked under his open-necked white shirt, and a handkerchief of the same pattern flowered in the breast pocket of his blazer. With his humpbacked posture, awk-

EXILE

BY

MARTIN KELLY

*For five years Luis Miguel Perez had lived in exile . . .
with three bodyguards . . . in constant fear of assassination.*

ward gait and sagging, wrinkled face, he looked like a dressed-up old turtle moving upright along the boardwalk.

Although he had been walking for a quarter of an hour, he had yet to meet or pass anyone. However, he wasn't a solitary figure. At his immediate left, carrying a folded umbrella, was one of his three bodyguards. Another reconnoitered the curb at the edge of the boardwalk, on the alert for a possible assassin lurking in one of the parked cars. The third man, who doubled as chauffeur, trailed them out on the boulevard in Perez's mammoth black American automobile. Ever since he had abruptly taken leave of his native land five years ago, Perez had been accompanied everywhere by these bodyguards. Two of them had been around him even longer than that; they had been members of the presidential guard and had fled the country with him. The driver was a Spaniard who had been recommended to him in Madrid. Perez had confidence in all three, although they had never really been put to the test since his exile had begun. In five years not a single attempt had been made on his life.

The first couple of years had been the most dangerous, with rumors of assassination plots and several direct threats by letter. Despite the bodyguards, Perez had lived in constant fear of meeting unexpectedly—at a turn in a hotel corridor, outside a restaurant, around a bend in the

road—the screaming, gun-waving fanatic of his nightmares. Over and over in his head it had been played out to the end, that horrible scene of his murder. It had been so realistic that when he awoke, trembling in his sweat-stained pyjamas and prodded by his complaining wife, he had dreaded to touch himself, afraid that his fingers would trace the bullet holes riddling his abdomen.

But that time of crisis had passed, and no assassin had appeared. The recurring nightmare had departed finally, leaving him with nothing more dramatic than a stomach ulcer as his only wound in reality. Danger there still was, for even today his country lacked a stable government, and the belief persisted that somehow he would manage a triumphant return. For himself, Perez no longer had any illusions about that. Nor did he have any desire to return now: he had ruled the country for nearly a decade, longer than anyone else in its history. That was enough for him.

Characteristically, though, he refrained from informing his partisans at home, and they went on collecting funds to bribe key officials, to purchase arms, to raise an invasion force. After a series of complicated transfers, the bulk of the money arrived twice a year in one of Perez's numbered bank accounts in Zurich or Geneva. There it stayed. He didn't really need it; he had accumulated a fortune before his departure. But he had been born a goatherd's

son, and he still retained, as he had throughout his years in power, the peasant's hoarding instinct. In a way, it was his strongest link with childhood, even stronger than religion. He was too old to sever it now.

His destination on this afternoon's walk was about twenty minutes away, if he kept to his present pace, and he was already late for the rendezvous. Whether he was late or not didn't matter. The ex-vizier would be waiting there in the hotel bar, as he always waited. Perez was certain of that. The ex-vizier, unlike Perez, hadn't shown a great deal of foresight. He too had been forced to flee his homeland, but his monarch's reign had been terminated so quickly and unexpectedly — by a hand grenade — that the ex-vizier had fled with little more than the clothes on his back. As a result, he had been obliged to take up the only profession for which his duties at court had given him any preparation: he had become a pimp. His clients were of a fairly high order; they varied from wealthy exiles like Perez to German and Italian industrialists to French politicians to Arab sovereigns more fortunate than the ex-vizier. He had called Perez earlier, mentioning some girls he had coming down from Paris that week end. Perez had agreed to meet him to discuss the details.

The quality of the ex-vizier's girls locally had declined with the close of the summer season, and the ex-

vizier himself would be gone before the month was out. He stayed on now only to accommodate a few special clients. Some had business to transact in Monte Carlo; some were having a run of luck at one of the casinos; some even preferred the off-season atmosphere. Perez was different. He stayed because he couldn't decide where else to go.

His range of choice was limited, for only a handful of countries would accept him even temporarily; still, it was a problem which he'd never had to deal with before. Always, in the past, his wife had made decisions like this for him, and she'd taken care of all the details. Even the flight into exile had been organized under her supervision. Perez had resented her for it, fought with her, had beaten her on occasion; but generally, he'd ended by going along with her plans. Now she was dead. She had died a little over two months ago, after unsuccessful surgery, vexing Perez in death as in life, for it had been the height of the season. With all the beaches of the coast crowded with girls, he had been forced into mourning.

He had looked forward impatiently to the end of it, thinking that for the first time he would be able to make his own decisions, travel as he pleased. Now the moment was at hand, and he didn't know what to do. Childless and wifeless, with no one to push him, he lingered in Nice, trying to make up his mind.

Just ahead of him on the board-

walk, a flight of steps descended to the beach. Two bicycles were propped up there at the top of the steps, as if forgotten at the end of summer. Perez, walking with eyes downcast, didn't notice the bicycles until he'd bumped into them, almost knocking one of them over. He caught and righted it, propping it beside the other against the railing. He paused and surveyed the beach. The man beside him stopped at the same moment; the fellow scouting the curb halted with him; and out in the road, the automobile came to a stop with the motor idling.

Two girls were wading, alone on the sand. They had their slacks rolled up above the knee, and they were darting in and out of the surf, shrieking as the cold water swirled around their bare legs. Perez regarded them with an experienced eye. One of them, dumpy in her oversized sweater, he dismissed without a second glance; but the other girl caught his attention. Tall and slim and blonde, she seemed graceful even in her childish leaps and squeals at the water's edge. The long legs flashed up and down; the supple body turned and bent; the yellow hair bobbed freely on her neck. While he was staring at her, she glanced over her shoulder and saw him. She beckoned, as if in invitation, calling something in English which he couldn't make out. Surprised, he waved back hesitantly. She laughed and ran off down the beach, in the direction from which

Perez had come, with the other girl tagging after her.

Perez, leaning on the damp railing, wistfully watched her go. Then he closed his eyes for a moment. Suddenly, magically, the day grew warm; the sea turned blue, deep blue and tranquil, and the beach was covered with tanned female bodies. Perez drank in their shouts and cries and laughter, their golden limbs rising and falling, lazily stretching in the sun. They lined the beach as far as he could see, and farther still: Nice, Antibes, Cannes, St. Raphael, St. Tropez . . . Miles and miles of sandy beaches lined with miles and miles of ripening, sun-warmed girls. . . .

Regretfully, he opened his eyes. It was October, it was chilly, and in a few minutes it would be raining again. He shook his head and moved away from the railing. With his hands behind his back, he resumed his march toward the rendezvous.

"Flowers?" exclaimed the ex-vizier. He sat back and looked at Perez with mock astonishment.

"Was many, many flowers," Perez elaborated.

"Really, old chap. Come now."

Perez shrugged. "Something diamond?"

"No, no, no, no, *no!*" The ex-vizier raised a manicured hand in protest. He was approximately Perez's age, but he was much more animated. He dressed elegantly, wore a carefully trimmed mustache and a great many rings. His appear-

ance and manner indicated that the private opportunities offered by his profession held little interest for him; his own desires took quite another direction.

"They're *used* to that sort of thing, old chap; they *expect* that sort of thing. One must provide the *unexpected*."

Perez shrugged again, rather irritated. Despite the inequality in their relationship, or perhaps because of it, the ex-vizier usually contrived to put him on the defensive. He didn't like it a bit.

"Well, I'll tell you." The ex-vizier leaned forward, his eyes glittering. "Our German friends put the matter *completely* in my hands, approving in advance any action I might take. First, I secured the young lady's measurements from one of the other dancers in the club." He paused. "*Measurements*," he repeated, for Perez had seemed puzzled by the word. The ex-vizier had been educated at British public schools, and though Perez's English vocabulary was not extensive, it was the one language they had in common. Perez knew only a few words of French, and the ex-vizier spoke no Spanish.

The ex-vizier illustrated by outlining a female shape in the air. Perez understood.

"These I brought with a photo to a dear friend who serves as consultant to one of the most *exclusive* shops in Paris. Within a few days, he provided with everything I'd re-

quested. I returned here the following day. That same evening, when she was dancing in the club and I knew her apartment would be empty, I persuaded the concierge, with the help of a few francs, to admit me to milady's chamber. I arranged all the little gifts on her bed, where she'd see them the *moment* she entered."

The ex-vizier tapped the table for emphasis as he enumerated.

"Two elegant and complete outfits, one for day and the other for evening wear. Dresses, hats, shoes, handbags, gloves, stockings, with jewelry for each outfit. A variety of underthings, lacy, black, the most *tempting* imaginable. Perfume, of course, for I'd also made it my business to discover the scent she preferred. And at the head of the bed, draped over the pillows, an *irresistable* mink stole."

He smiled and stroked his mustache, waiting for Perez's reaction. Perez, who knew he was waiting, sipped his mineral water and said nothing. The ex-vizier frowned slightly and continued:

"Well, I placed our German friend's card on the night table—just the card, you understand, all very discreet. I then told him to call the lady the following day and invite her to dinner. And there isn't a woman in the *world*, old chap, who wouldn't have accepted that invitation, if it meant that she could keep all those lovely things. Well, need I tell you the outcome? Her resist-

ance melted, and a week later she went off to Capri with him."

Sighing, the ex-vizier sat back and fitted a cigarette into his holder. He had a tic in his right eyelid which, when he was speaking, passed almost unnoticed in the lively working of his features. At other times it was the only sign of life in his suddenly decrepit face. It was as if, even in repose, he was winking to hint at some lechery still unrevealed.

Perez had grasped the general drift of the story, if not every detail. He wondered how much all those presents had cost, but he decided not to ask.

Outside, blown by the wind, the rain slanted against the windows beyond their corner table. They had little more to say to each other. Perez had examined the photographs of the girls who were coming from Paris, had chosen one definitely and another tentatively. The financial arrangements had been agreed upon. He remained because it was too early for dinner, and he had no other plans for the afternoon.

He looked around the rich, walnut-paneled room, past his two bodyguards who kept watch at a table nearby. Hardly a dozen people were there. The clientele was composed mainly of middle-aged women, sitting alone or in groups of two and three, chattering and eyeing the younger waiters and nibbling at hors d'oeuvres. Across the room was an obvious blonde *poule*, with her coat thrown open to reveal a tight

red dress. The elderly Arab beside her patted her hand and glared about him, as if sensing a challenge from somewhere. In a far corner, a violinist and pianist had been tuning up and hissing at each other in Italian for the past ten minutes; at last, with *O Sole Mio*, they launched into the cocktail hour serenade.

Perez turned back to the ex-vizier, who was staring moodily out at the rain and the fading afternoon.

"This bloody weather," said the ex-vizier vaguely. He glanced at Perez. "Old chap, I read this morning that your country is having its problems again. There's talk that a mutual friend of ours may be preparing his return."

Enigmatic behind the dark glasses, Perez shrugged and said nothing.

"Naturally, my interest is purely personal. I'm no longer concerned with *secrets of state*."

He still said nothing. The ex-vizier gave up.

"Party in Monte tonight. This chap Valsarian, you know him. I suppose you'll be there."

Perez knew that the ex-vizier knew that he wouldn't be there. He gave no parties and was seldom invited to any. It was just another of the ex-vizier's tricks to put him on the defensive. He feigned indifference.

"Maybe," he said. "Or maybe casino."

The ex-vizier brushed ash from his sleeve and returned his gaze to the window.

"Ah," he sighed, "this bloody, bloody, weather."

Perez liked to gamble; he particularly liked roulette. It was, along with girls and his bank statements, one of his chief interests in life. But he hated to lose money, no matter how small the amount. During his days of glory at home, there had been a story about his gambling. The casinos accomplished their payments to the regime, it had been said, by letting Perez win at a specially rigged table. The story was only partly true: Perez had been allowed to win, but the winnings were only a portion of the amount which the casinos had contributed to his administration. In fact, the rigging had been primarily a psychological tactic designed to keep Perez in good humor. Although it had been generally successful in that respect, it had also spoiled him for gambling elsewhere: the habit of winning all the time was a hard one to break.

Still, the gambling habit itself was even harder to break, and besides, he had little else to occupy him. That evening, after dinner in his rented villa on the outskirts of Nice, he put on his tuxedo and went out to play roulette.

He chose Nice's Palais de la Méditerranée rather than the Monte Carlo casino, because lately he'd been having a run of luck in the Palais. The place showed only slight activity. Aside from the untidy Frenchmen, fretting over their little black notebooks, it contained the

usual off-season gamblers—middle-aged women like those in the hotel bar, anonymous young tourists whose budgets had a certain percentage to be donated to the casino, American sailors from the ships anchored off Villefranche, elderly couples on a thrift vacation. After a few opening plays, Perez was convinced that his luck was not only holding, it was improving. He gradually began to increase his bets.

Approximately an hour later, he had multiplied his original stake many times over, and he was well into his best winning streak in months, if not years. The awareness of it had an intoxicating effect on him. Gone was the lethargy which had been oppressing him recently; he sat hunched over the table, barely holding in his excitement. He tapped his fingertips together and fidgeted in his chair, smoking one after another the cigars which his doctors had forbidden him. A bodyguard stood directly behind him, and another was stationed on the opposite side of the table; but Perez had completely forgotten their presence, as he had forgotten the presence of every other person in the room. Nothing existed for him but the wheel, and the tickety-tick-tick of the ball bouncing around it. By now he had reached the apex of his betting pattern—an elaborate one which progressed from the numbered columns to number clusters and finally, when the wheel seemed right, to individual number bets.

When it paid off, Perez collected all over the table.

Thirteen was the number he favored at the moment. He waited, his eyes fixed on the wheel, oblivious to the disgust of the Frenchman muttering beside him, who threw up his hands and rose from the table. Then, just as the ball began its circuit, he was distracted by the sweet, pleasant odor of a freshly scrubbed body as someone took the chair vacated by the Frenchman. He heard feminine voices speaking in English.

"No more than twenty-five francs, remember."

"Stop worrying so much," said the girl seated beside Perez.

Despite himself, he glanced away from the wheel turning his dark glasses in her direction. He recognized her at once: she was the blonde girl, apparently an American, who had waved to him from the beach that afternoon. For a moment he thought happily that she had recognized him too—but no, she was looking past him, her eyes darting around the table. Covertly he studied her profile: her unlined forehead, straight nose, full red mouth, lifted chin emphasizing the long curve of her throat. Her hair hung loose and shining to the round neckline of a sleeveless black jersey, which was encircled by a single strand of artificial pearls.

"Look," she said with a gasp, "it's thirteen! Oh, I was going to play it; it's my lucky number."

Perez turned away from her to

take in his winnings. He did it without enthusiasm, however, for he had suddenly lost all interest in the play. An awareness of her body had introduced itself completely between him and the table; the temptation of the down on her bare arms, only inches away, was almost too much for him. Her companion—the unattractive other girl from the beach—leaned on her shoulder, cautioning her in a nasal voice. Perez stole glances at her breasts, sloping within the wool jersey, and longed to run his fingers over that round, bare arm. His hand moved nervously on the baize.

She lost her few chips in three spins of the wheel. Now her companion was urging her to leave. She hesitated, pouting a bit. Perez pushed some of his own chips in front of her. She turned to look at him with surprise, smiling but then shaking her head no. Perez nodded vigorously.

"Take," he said. "Yes, take."

"It's very nice of you but—"

"Take, please," Perez insisted. He patted her hand on the table.

Blushing, she said at last, "Well, thank you."

Perez nodded again, smiling back at her. With a paternal air, he watched as she made her bets. He was picturing her body as it must have been earlier, clean under the shower spray or in the bath. Young girl, blonde girl. How could he keep her with him? He could invite her for supper, perhaps, or for a ride in

his automobile. The other one needn't come along; he would find some way to get rid of her. They would be alone. But how could he arrange that? The difficulty was that he was helpless, despite long experience, with a girl like this—so different from the girls with whom the ex-vizier provided him. He didn't know which move was the right one.

Or was she so different?

She soon lost the chips he had given her. She smiled at him again. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm afraid I'm just not lucky." She started to get up from the table.

On an impulse, Perez pushed his whole enormous pile of chips in front of her. He surprised himself by doing it almost as much as he surprised her.

"Take all," he said eagerly.

She looked at him with startled eyes.

"All," he said, "yes. Take."

Then he saw that it had been a mistake. He had frightened her. She shook her head firmly.

"I couldn't do that," she said. "Thank you so much."

Helpless to prevent her, Perez took the hand she offered him to shake and watched her leave the table. He stayed there only a moment after she was gone. His gesture in offering her the chips had been witnessed by all the others; now he was embarrassed by it. It occurred to him that if he caught up with her before she left the *Palaise*, he could

recover the ground lost by suggesting that he drive her wherever she was going. The other one could come too; he no longer cared about that. He just wanted to sense her body beside him once more. He had one of the bodyguards cash in his chips and hurried out to the elevator.

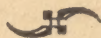
The girls had apparently left the building immediately, for they weren't in the lobby downstairs. Perez went outside and paused undecidedly on the steps. Spying him there, his driver brought the car up and got out to hold the door for him. Disappointed, Perez came slowly down the steps. Just as he was about to get in the car, he realized that the rain had ceased, at least for the moment, and he thought that perhaps the girls had crossed to walk along the *Promenade*. He went around the rear of the automobile and stood in the street, looking across the way. The driver came around after him and waited with his hand on the other door.

Standing like that, with the brightly illuminated white façade of the *Palais* behind him, Perez made a perfect target. The car which had been trailing him for days, its occupants hoping for just such an opportunity, pulled out of its parking place and drove toward him. As it approached, the rear window rolled down to reveal the barrel of a sub-machine gun. It stitched Perez efficiently right across his stomach. He crumpled to the street. His driver, whose reflexes were quicker, had

thrown himself flat and escaped being wounded. The car roared off, with Perez's second bodyguard tossing some ineffectual pistol shots after it.

The man who had cashed Perez's chips came running out of the Palais, and the three bodyguards lifted Perez into his automobile. Recklessly, the driver headed the car toward the private clinic favored by Perez outside the city.

Lying on the rear seat with his hands clasped over his stomach, Perez leaned his head against the window and watched the Promenade with its palm trees flying past. He knew that he was going to die. It wasn't in the least like his old nightmare, for he wasn't frightened at all. He was simply annoyed and angry. It was so stupid. In his last conscious thought, he wondered which direction the girl had taken.



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